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ABSTRACT

This monograph begins with an overview of Project Group Work, a school counseling approach designed to enhance services to at-risk students and to further develop the skills of school social workers, psychologists, and other school personnel through the use of group counseling in the schools. It contains seven chapters. "Types of School Based Groups" (Mary Cashman and Howard Harrington) focuses on groups which benefit the child in the school setting, exploring theoretical and practical aspects of such groups and demonstrating the therapeutic factors present. "Practical Considerations" (Dennis Boore and John Kimple) emphasizes practical considerations in the implementation of group counseling in the schools. "Developmental Stages in Groups" (Frank Ogden) briefly describes the accepted stages of group development (initial stage, transitional stage, working stage). "Leadership Skills" (Delores O'Dell) outlines recent research regarding leadership functions and effectiveness in different types of groups, describes specific leadership skills as they relate to the stages of group development, and discusses practical considerations in applying these skills. "Teacher As Co-Leader" (Kathleen Peterschmidt) discusses the role of the classroom teacher as a co-leader in counseling groups. "M. D. Classroom Groups" (Jim Ott) examines the six stages of group process and considers the specific modifications that might be necessary in dealing with mentally disabled students, "Group Counseling with the Hearing Impaired" (Delores O'Dell) describes practical considerations in developing a group for the hearing impaired, examining counseling strategies, specific materials, and necessary accommodations. (NB)

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Project Group Work

An Innovative Approach to Counseling in Schools

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Project Group Work

An Innovative Approach to Counseling in Schools

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Project Group Work: An Overview

Historically, therapy groups have largely been the domain of community mental health services and private agencies. However, as Iowa shifts its services toward community-based services, public schools are increasingly expected to provide programs for students who previously might have been served by other institutions. This shift in services necessitates public schools providing therapeutic milieu for students with behavioral difficulties. Group counseling can be instrumental in developing such an environment. The format typically consisted of lessons in identification of feelings, teaching social skills, and identification of alternative patterns of behavior. Project Group Work is designed to be an alternative to the instructional groups commonly conducted in the schools. The emphasis in Project Group Work is on the therapeutic benefits gained by progressing through the developmental stages of counseling groups and upon the value of peers interacting about the significant personal and family problems which interfere with the student's school success.

Project Group Work was created with the expectancy of enhancing services to "at risk" students and further developing the skills of school social workers, psychologists, and other school personnel. Further, it was believed that there would be numerous benefits realized by utilizing the classroom teacher as a co-therapist, including removing the "crystal ball" mystique from counseling therapy (Peterschmidt). It was also thought that an uncomfortable amount of counseling/therapy was being conducted without routine planning and purposeful goals in place which this project approach would serve to change. Finally, it was believed that "talk groups" work; that the vast majority of school age children, kindergarten through twelfth grades, will communicate and problem solve by "talking", that theory becomes secondary to developing talking and listening skills.

We began Project Group Work with three basic premises: (1) group counseling is often the intervention of choice, (2) many school social workers, psychologists, and educational personnel do not have adequate professional training or sufficient personal confidence in their group work skills to comfortably engage in this method, and (3) group counseling will not "hurt anyone", as long as leaders are adequately prepared, and counseling sessions are appropriate to the educational setting.

Project Group Work was awarded funds from the Iowa Department of Education. The project is designed to provide training in group counseling skills to school social workers, school psychologists, and selected local education agency personnel. This project is unique in that it:

- Emphasizes group work with "at-risk" students
- Utilizes the counseling group for diagnosis and intervention through a discussion/ problem-solving approach
- Develops the group into a peer support system
- Provides supervised group work training in the school setting
- Lessens the need for the more traditional "pull-out" therapy approaches by utilizing the classroom teacher as a co-leader

During the initial phase of the project, each staff member had one "target" group with which they were expected to practice the skills obtained in inservice training sessions. The inservice sessions were provided by four experienced and highly-qualified national experts in group counseling. These trainers were:

Tom Maronne, M.D., Child Psychiatrist, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania
Carlos Estrada, M.D., Child Psychiatrist, Menniger Foundation, Topeka, Kansas
Gerald Corey, Ph.D., Professor and Coordinator, Human Services Program, California State University, Fullerton, California
Nick Colangelo, Ph.D., Chair, Educational Counseling Department, University of Iowa

Each trainer was selected for the unique expertise they could contribute to the overall development of the project. The project directors molded the trainers' different counseling perspectives into a comprehensive counseling approach. The staff who participated in the initial training session, which consisted of a five-day session with Dr. Maronne at King of Prussia, Pennsylvania, were expected to act in the capacity of "Master Teachers" and assist in the training of subsequent staff participants. Staff also were involved in bi-monthly peer consultation sessions which included reviewing video tapes of actual group sessions. This peer review became an integral component of the project.

Since its inception, the project focus has expanded to include, not only "at-risk" special education students, but also "at-risk" regular education students. The latter population consists of students who are considered for high risk specialized services due to problematic behaviors which interfere with successful school performance. The major goals of Project Group Work are, therefore, twofold. First, to assist special education students in developing the skills and attitudes needed for successful integration into mainstream educational programs and, second, to prevent "at-risk" students from requiring special education services.

In Project Group Work, emphasis was placed upon group leadership skills and the classroom teacher as co-leader. Eight leadership skills, ranging from clarification to confrontation, were identified and inservice training provided to school social workers, psychologists, and selected special education teachers. The training provided to the group leaders was adapted from of the clinical supervision, master teacher , and peer consultation models. In addition to training in leadership skills, the twenty Master's and Ph.D. level school social workers and psychologists participating in the project received training in child development theories, group process and dynamics, and relevant group-therapy models. Simultaneously, group leaders applied their acquired skills with target groups of behaviorally disordered special education students. The group leaders were expected to have a defined purpose for the group, group goals, and individual student objectives. Supervision and evaluation of skill development was an integral part of the project.

The groups are viewed as therapeutic discussion groups for elementary and secondary-age special needs and at-risk students. The primary purpose of the groups is to provide a safe environment in which students can feel comfortable discussing the personal issues that are interfering with their educational functioning.

Group counseling with at-risk students is a process by which students engage in self-discovery and develop a greater understanding and concern for themselves and others. Group members interact in a supportive environment which fosters belonging and hopefulness. Individuals learn to function as cooperative, contributing group members, thereby preparing themselves for more successful participation in "natural" educational, work, family, and peer groups. The counseling group is perceived by the students as a peer support group as it becomes a safe place to express feelings, gain insights into behavioral alternatives, and receive positive reinforcement. The students are encouraged to discuss feelings associated with having a disability, peer/adult relationship problems, and any other unresolved issues that are contributing to poor school adjustment, and/or performance.

Group counseling encourages and rewards decision making, initiative, sensitivity to and awareness of others, and progressive acceptance of responsibility for one's own behavior. Selected programming of activities, opportunities for reality testing, support for mastery of social and academic skills, and improvement in behavior and self-esteem, together maximize the impact of the group experience on the student. Further, by offering students the opportunity to discuss concerns that are interfering with educational performance, the students begin to perceive the school as a more caring institution.

Several of the contributing authors in this monograph will expand upon a premise of Project Group Work, that group counseling is the treatment of choice (Cashman/Harrington, Boore/Kimple). Group practice maximizes practioner efficiency and enables many more students to participate than is feasible in the more traditional individual counseling or psychotherapy modes. The group is a natural and familiar setting for students since they have been exposed to groups throughout their lives, e.g., the family constellation, clubs, sport teams, and classrooms. Although we recognize that not all students can function in or benefit from a group experience, for many it offers abundant advantages over individual interventions.

Other contributors will explore and discuss existing theory and practice, interpreting how these phenomena fit into the art of group leadership. If one assumes that group counseling is appropriate and can be beneficial for all grades, K-12, then it becomes apparent that the group leader must have a keen grasp of developmental psychology, as well as, psycho-pathology. It is imperative that the group leader know what to expect of first graders or third graders or socially fixated Behaviorally Disordered students in order to know what type skill development is essential to become a productive group member (Ott, O'Dell).

As you read these chapters, the editors wish to remind you that the project had general parameters that focused on building the self-confidence of the leaders, as well as their skills. Homogeneous functioning was discouraged and rather, leaders were urged to utilize their skills and adapt to the populations where they could best be used or where their interest lay. Thus, you will see that certain participants utilized the group process exclusively with existing special education classes, while others chose to work more with topic-related or interest groups. Still others saw this approach as a viable method of preventative work with the high-risk regular education student. This collection of writings is not intended to be a literary work but rather a practical reflection of our experiences as group leaders in the school setting.

The Iowa Project Group Work experience is preventative, developmental, and remedial in nature. Its multi-dimensional impact lends credence to the group work approach within special education, provides validity for its use with topic-related or special interest groups of all students, e.g. divorce, terminal illness, or drug use, and looks exceedingly promising as a preventative approach to all "at-risk" students.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER I: **Types Of School Based Groups** 1
Mary Cashman and Howard Harrington

CHAPTER II: **Practical Considerations** 16
Dennis Boore and John Kimple

CHAPTER III: **Developmental Stages In Groups** 32
Frank Ogden

CHAPTER IV: **Leadership Skills** 46
Delores O'Dell

CHAPTER V: **Teacher As Co-Leader** 58
Kathleen Peterschmidt

CHAPTER VI: **M. D. Classroom Groups** 72
Jim Ott

CHAPTER VII: **Group Counseling With The Hearing Impaired** 80
Delores O'Dell

Types of School Based Groups

Mary Cashman, Social Worker
Howard Harrington, Social Worker

Abstract

This paper focuses on groups which benefit the child in the school setting. The authors explore both the theoretical and practical aspects of these groups and demonstrate the therapeutic factors present. The groups discussed fall into the following categories: training, treatment, educational, problem-solving, and specialized. The chapter examines the critical variables and factors necessary for constructive group process in the various types of school-based groups.

Introduction

The professional staffing problem in schools appears to be growing more acute as federal and state funding declines and better informed education personnel develops. These trends combine with a growth in the special education population to increase demand for direct counseling services. One partial solution to this problem is to use the support team (social worker, psychologist, or consultant) to deliver and offer group counseling services to the special education student. Group should be offered as the treatment of choice and as a viable alternative to individual psychotherapy for several reasons. Groups of children and parents are often the desirable pattern of service delivery on a continuous basis. The group is a natural part of the lives of individuals in and out of schools. These services are more compatible with the school environment than individual services and often are better received by educators who also view the group as a natural delivery system. Groups provide experiences that can enhance the coping patterns of individuals and improve the quality of interactions among the members (Winters and Easton, 1983). Groups and consequent participation by the students have the ability to effect change at different levels of the school organization in the classroom, between classes, between students, between students and faculties, and outside the school setting.

Current literature reveals a description of several specific group programs. Rose (1987) researched a group for developing the social skills of young people in middle childhood. Hipple (1982) provides an overview of essential aspects of beginning and maintaining a counseling group for suicidal individuals. Clark and Seals (1984) describe the effectiveness of group counseling for ridiculed children based on Adlerian principles. The effects of divorce groups on children's classroom behavior and their attitudes toward divorce have been investigated by Anderson, Kinney, and Gerler (1984). While the group counseling programs may be cited, they tend to focus on the benefits of specific group services for the school-aged child or adolescent. Then the group's objectives, format, and interventive techniques are discussed.

This paper focuses on the theoretical and practical factors involved in implementing the use of group services in the school. This is followed by a discussion of five types of school-based groups including their common and diverse variables.

Group counseling is extremely well suited for school practice. A variety of therapeutic and practical factors blend in ways that make group the preferred approach in a wide range of situations. Many factors are site determined, relating to school practice in general or to specific referrals. Other factors are theoretical. These factors have to do with the therapeutic value for student participants. Can students receive emotional and social development benefits from participating in group counseling? Research and personal experience have taught many school-based group practitioners that they can.

The educational process rests on group activities in all phases of instruction and recreation. Teachers and administrators can easily relate to group counseling, making acceptance of such an intervention a natural process. From the point of view of the support person faced with unwieldy caseloads, group counseling is an efficient way to serve a number of students simultaneously. When classes are small, as in special education, a whole class can be included at once. If a teacher is co-therapist, he or she can benefit by observing the support person's approaches and methods of dealing with behaviors and interactions. Planning and processing sessions with the co-therapist can provide education in group process which is sadly lacking in teacher training. A long term group project in which a whole class and teacher participate should provide therapeutic benefit to each individual involved, as well as enhancing the functioning of the classroom as a whole.

Any given school building can produce a large range of problems or issues that demand a response from the support team. Issues shift as the school year progresses and interactional combinations among students and staff members emerge. Events outside the school are constantly impacting on the mental health and behavior of its students. All of these factors, which are unique to each site and always shifting, call for group intervention and are determinants when implementing group counseling.

Groups can approach a variety of issues and serve a variety of purposes. Location and membership can be extremely valuable for group projects in any building. Group counseling does not usually require a large or specialized facility. A private room large enough for the planned activity can usually be found. If the group is being done with direct administrative participation in planning, a space is usually provided. The flexibility of the group approach allows for student selection from many classrooms at once or can focus on a specific classroom. Students can be mixed and matched to suit their needs or the development which has created the immediate need for this type of intervention. This chapter's discussion of many types of school-based groups will demonstrate the practical versatility of group counseling as a school-based service.

Group therapy or counseling theory delineate a number of therapeutic factors present in well-run groups. These factors are not limited to traditional adult psychotherapy groups and are certainly evident in school-based counseling groups. Yalom calls these "curative factors" (Yalom, 1975). Corey and Corey describe them as "therapeutic factors" (Corey and Corey, 1977). The net benefit of the therapeutic factors can include psychodynamic change and improvement of the student's self esteem.

A primary therapeutic factor which can be present in all types of groups is the instillation of hope or the belief that change is possible (Corey and Corey, 1977). A safe setting is provided in which students can "try on" new, more pro-social behaviors, demonstrating to them that alternatives can work. Acceptance of all members is crucial to this process. When feeling acceptance, members can begin to give positive feelings to others, enhancing the self-esteem of giver and receiver (Yalom, 1975).

Specific learning takes place in group through the group process, as well as in training sessions. Through normal group functioning, members learn trust and honesty (Yalom, 1975) and can develop an emotional cognitive process of identifying and expressing feelings (Corey and Corey). These factors emerge as a group progresses and members offer and accept feedback, suggestions, and guidance from fellow members and leaders. In a more directive sense, groups can focus on training of specific social skills (Yalom, 1975) and (Corey and Corey, 1977).

A general effect of all good groups is the development of cohesion among members (Corey and Corey, 1977 and Yalom, 1975). This bond promotes students helping each other strive for success in school. When group members are from several classrooms, their cohesion multiplies the positive effect of group counseling throughout the whole school. When a group is made up of one class and teacher, cohesion will have a positive influence on behavior and cooperation in all class activities.

The factors just described will be found in any group which functions effectively over at least several weeks. Group leaders, when planning groups, must decide which factors are most desirable at a given time for the referred students. As we discuss a number of general types of groups, some of the practical and therapeutic factors involved in each will be highlighted.

Group possibilities in schools approach the infinite. For the practical purposes of this manual, group types are reduced to five general categories. These five are: treatment oriented groups, training groups, educational groups, problem-solving groups, and specialized groups. Treatment groups are similar to traditional psycho-therapeutic groups. Such groups may place the highest demands upon members and leaders. Training groups are intended to impart quite specific skills to members. Educational groups provide members information about a topic and rely on cognitive development and group process for internalization of reactions to the information by members. Problem-solving groups are issue oriented, dealing with the here and now of behavior changes of members. Specialized groups, of which only a few possibilities will be examined, provide a focused activity dealing with a chosen issue or targeted behaviors of the members.

Degree of Structure

A common topic of discussion among group leaders working in schools is the structure of the groups they lead. **Elements of structure in school-based groups distill down to one objective: behavior management**. The need for structure is determined by the ability of members to manage their behavior as necessary for the functioning of the group. Verbal skills, maturity, and activity levels are key factors to consider when assessing group skills of potential members. The number of sessions the group will meet will also determine the amount of structure needed. **We have been repeatedly surprised by the ability of primary aged children to participate in a loosely structured group after the group has met for several weeks and behavioral norms have been established**. This effect can be seen in classroom groups that function for consecutive years with common members. Each of the types of groups we will describe can utilize any amount or type of structure, depending upon the preferences of the leaders and the abilities of the members. Some, by their activity-based orientation, have inherent structural features. Others allow for flexibility with member-formed norms as a prime objective.

Treatment Oriented Groups

A common group found in school settings is the treatment oriented or therapy group. This group is similar to classical therapy groups in structure and purpose. The form is simple: members talk and listen to other members. In schools, this type of group deals with problems and change on a conscious level. The school setting is not the place to deal with major personality changes or psychotic disorders. **In treatment groups, the leaders facilitate interaction among members, promoting self-disclosure, mutual support, and a sharing of personal learning**. A minimum of overt structure is a hallmark of such groups. Members are self-motivated to personal exploration and change. Facilitation is the major role of the group leaders. School-based therapy groups are an excellent forum for dealing with current personal issues of members. A variety of leader techniques and theoretical orientations can be accommodated in this type of group.

In order to be effective and beneficial to members, the treatment oriented group must reach and sustain what has been described as the working stage (Corey and Corey, 1977). In this phase of the group, which should be the majority of total sessions, there is a high level of trust which promotes some risk taking. Cohesion is high and leadership functions are shared by group members. Conflict is accepted and resolved. The development of such characteristics in a group demands concentration on two practical factors: selection of members and the number of total sessions. Member traits are somewhat demanding for this group. It is obvious that members must have the maturity and communication skills necessary for examining personal issues in front of others. This group is most suitable for fairly well-functioning secondary students. Younger students can reach a working group stage but have difficulty maintaining it. Time is another factor. Groups require several sessions to get to the work phase. With well-chosen members, twelve sessions can produce a fruitful experience for students. Less mature members will require more sessions to reach the working stage, thus requiring more total sessions for a complete program.

Therapy groups are most demanding of leaders. **An excellent grasp of group process and confidence in technique are necessary**. The leader must be willing to take a less active role as the group matures, a risky proposition for many of us. Pre-screening of members is more rigorous for this type of group. The number of sessions required and the need for screening make the time commitment for leaders considerable. The rewards of a successful group are well worth the effort, though. More therapeutic factors are available to members in this group than in any other we will discuss. If many school-based practitioners could consistently watch their students in a working therapy group, they would consider themselves to be successful. Leaders who cannot operate without planned activities or a packaged program would not feel comfortable leading this type of group.

Treatment oriented groups should deal with the here and now as much as possible, concentrating on members' emotional reactions to current issues. If the group bogs down, the leader can help approach issues through less threatening symbolic exercises such as family sculpting or role playing. Too much intervention or too many leader introduced exercises, however, can inhibit the group's development as a living entity.

Training Groups

Training groups are groups specifically oriented to assist students in the development of social skills. **The group usually arises in response to a variety of concerns regarding the student's lack of appropriate social behaviors, particularly as they relate to the school environment**. While training groups can be of value for most disabilities it has particular response in the M.D. classroom. This section will focus on that population. One example of a training group has been implemented in several classrooms for students with mental disabilities - from mild-to-severe disorders. While some social skill concerns are being met individually as a part of each student's individual education program, most often this training program is felt to be of particular importance in the sense that the general curriculum does not specifically address this essential area of skill development. In addition there is little opportunity for these students to practice appropriate social skills, independent of when problems arise during interactions of this nature.

There are developed curriculum programs [such as Department of Education's Project SISS (Systematic Instruction of Social Skills), Skillstreaming the Child or Adolescent] which are designed to teach social skills to the mentally disabled students. However, these groups can and are implemented in the classroom without using a specific curriculum. Topics for the group sessions are often selected in conjunction with the concerns and needs of the classroom teacher. Parental input has also been solicited. Relevant topics for the higher functioning student have included: responding to name calling and teasing, expressing anger, responding to peer pressure, expressing feelings, making positive statements about self, and dealing with being left out. Topics for the lower functioning students have included: maintaining appropriate eye contact while speaking to another person, listening to others speaking, responding to another student's questions, encouraging interaction of students during the discussion.

Most training groups are held on a weekly basis for one-half hour sessions with co-leaders. The structure and format can be taken from the lesson plan provided by specific curriculum or developed by the leaders. The primary facilitator usually consists of support personnel - social worker or psychologist. However, the teacher is often an important active participant for the following four reasons: to help maintain order and keep the students on task, provide anecdotal information to the facilitators so as to make the lessons situationally relevant, to sometimes interpret student's remarks (especially with the lower functioning student), and most importantly, to be aware of the week's lesson and discussion so as to help the students practice and generalize what they have learned during the half hour sessions on a day-to-day basis. It is important to devote a particular session to a particular topic. Then, subsequent sessions may involve discussing specific problems as they relate to the principles of that which has already been covered.

An important component of all the sessions is role-playing. This can be done by the facilitators, a student and a facilitator, and/or two or three students. This enables the student to exercise the skill and receive feedback on the skill performance. Follow up in relevant classroom situations encourages the student to perform the skill in settings outside the group.

The addition of a social skills training program to a special education curriculum, especially for mentally disabled students is sorely needed. However, an assessment tool to measure change or improvement as it might relate to implementation should also be included. It is recommended that both general and specific goals be set for the training group with pre and post-training measures to assess related changes.

Educational Groups

Frequently, a specific issue arises which may effect a small group of students or a whole classroom. Coping with divorced parents, dealing with grief due to a loss, or problems of dating are common themes of educational groups in schools. These groups are highly appreciated by teachers and principals, for they provide an efficient way of facing a specific problem in a school building. In educational groups, students are exposed to information by the leader through oral presentation or the use of media. Group members then react to the information cognitively and emotionally. Reactions are shared through discussion, and learning is reinforced through the group process. Members observe the reactions of others and can receive feedback on their own learning. Relating to the experiences of a peer can make the material more relevant to students than through purely didactic exposition of the subject. This type of group differs from training groups in the emphasis on feelings elicited by the subject. Mastery of specific skills is not the objective. Self examination and processing of feelings is the goal of educational groups.

Educational groups impart information and explore reactions. They also have clear therapeutic benefits, and the dominant therapeutic factor is sharing. Those effected by the topic of the group are able to see that they are not alone with their feelings. Others are present in their classroom or school who have had similar experiences. Feelings of isolation and hopelessness are diminished as the group becomes a support system for members. For many students, this group experience may be the first time they have expressed strong feelings about sensitive issues in front of peers. The group offers a secure setting in which such expressive skills can begin to be developed. School becomes an emotionally supportive environment.

All grade levels of students and all disabilities can benefit from this type of group. A variable factor is the level of content and how it is to be imparted to members. Leaders must gear their presentation to the intellectual level of the students. Media resources are extensive enough to provide quality presentation on almost any topic, for any age group. A good presentation which is interesting and stimulating will usually be enough structure in itself.

Subsequent discussion can utilize common leader techniques to facilitate participation and establish group norms. These groups are time limited in nature, requiring enough sessions for adequate exposure to the subject and the opportunity for members to share their experiences and feelings on the subject. A minimum of three sessions is required for this type of group.

One of the authors has provided sexual abuse training prevention education in elementary level special education classes. These educational groups provided the same tips for self-protection for the total age range and for students spanning a wide range of cognitive ability. An animated film with follow-up drilling and role playing was used with the younger children. A contemporary film with like age characters was followed by discussion and role playing when presenting the material to intermediate students. Secondary students could cover the same topic in a discussion format and by extending the scope into dating. Notice that the same concepts can be transmitted by altering the format and using a variety of media aides.

Problem Solving Groups

The issue of problem-solving may be an inherent objective in most groups in the schools. However, problem-solving groups focus on specific issues which usually occur in the classroom or general school setting. It focuses on the here and now, and the goal is on specific behavior change. Simply, these groups are offered to respond to the needs of the students who have difficulty arriving at socially appropriate responses to situations which cause them problems. There is little room in the daily curriculum to deal with non-academic problem solving and little opportunity for the students to actually practice appropriate problem-solving skills when the situation presents itself.

Selection of topics for the group sessions may be selected spontaneously from the students in the group or pre-planned in conjunction with the classroom teachers. A variety of topics may be discussed including: How to Deal With Anger, How to Avoid Fights in the Lunchroom or on the Bus, Taking Responsibility for One's Own Behavior, Responding to School Authority, and Negotiating Rules at Home or School.

Like most groups in the schools, these sessions usually occur on a weekly basis for half an hour. They may or may not be time limited depending on the age disability and functioning level. A B.D. junior high student may have enough issues for a semester long group while a lower functioning M.D. student may benefit from a short term six-eight session group with only one-two topics continually discussed. The planning is usually done by the support personnel leading the group. The structure and format may be decided by the co-leaders or provided by a particular planned curriculum program (if available). Although the primary facilitators may be social worker and/or psychologist, the issue of including the classroom teacher should be discussed. The reasons for including the teacher do not differ from the inclusion list in other groups. Some drawbacks to including the teachers in these types of group are: Students may be intimidated by the teacher's presence inhibiting their candid expression of personal issues or teachers overdisciplining, reducing spontaneity. However, one issue of problem-solving is to deal directly with those involved, and many classroom issues include the teacher. Therefore, including or excluding the teacher should be consistent in fulfillment of the specific goal of the group. With the entire class making up the member composition, the issues for discussion can easily be practiced as the students will have a frame of reference or background information on the day's discussion.

In one B.D. group composed of ten fourth - sixth grade boys and girls, the students were concerned with their image in the school. They felt they did not have the same privileges as other students in either regular or special education classes in that school. When asked to be more specific, they came up with a short list of differences. After looking over the list, the class picked the one issue they felt they could do something about changing. They wanted hall lockers. They came up with an action plan rationale and a spokesperson to talk to the principal. The students did get their lockers but had to do some compromising. The principal stated they would lose locker privileges if they abused them (slamming doors, jamming locks, etc.). The students felt pride and a sense of accomplishment in knowing that they saw a problem and came up with a viable solution.

During the actual group session, there is a concentrated effort directed on practicing the appropriate problem-solving responses learned through the group process. There are principles taught during the sessions that can be enhanced by having the students practice perhaps via role-playing, the appropriate way of behaving immediately after a problem has arisen and compelling them and others to critique their performance. It may be important, depending on the level of the group members' ability, for the facilitators to make an effort in obtaining related materials, i.e., films, videotapes, books, etc. that relate to specific problem-solving situations. At times, students can benefit from a bombardment of information surrounding a specific issue to give the student a variety of options in which to choose appropriate responses to a problem-solving crises.

Specialized Groups

The final type of group to be discussed is a broad category of activities which have one thing in common, a specific product or project. Examples of such groups are task groups and performance groups. Such activities are quite common in schools but take on a new value when viewed in relation to the benefits of group process. Therapeutic benefits are present in these specialized groups. A new dimension of experience is available to student participants if leaders pay as much attention to the experience itself as to the final product.

All schools have some type of performance group. If the group is small enough and is designed with specific therapeutic factors in mind, some of the benefits of traditional group counseling will emerge. In creating a performance, the teamwork and cohesion factors are obvious. More individually oriented development opportunities are also present. A puppetry group of upper level elementary students in Davenport, Iowa has combined regular and special education students for the past few years. Leaders have observed increased self-esteem and greater confidence in student members. Each year as the group develops, members must practice sharing, giving, and accepting feedback, and problem solving. Students learn that such positive social skills are essential for a good performance (Canright and Cowherd, 1988). A secondary gain of performance activities can be an internalization of the content of plays or songs. Repetition of pro-social themes in rehearsal and performance provides a training factor to this type of group.

Another group activity of specific focus is the task group. Some task groups complete projects for the school, such as holding a dance or raising funds. Others focus on community service projects. Again, we emphasize the importance of planning and leading such activities in ways that allow students to receive maximum social and emotional benefits. Of course, it is important for the school to be proud of the final task product. Able leadership can ensure such pride while also focusing on student development issues. The development of leadership, cooperative effort, decision making, and organizational skills are important benefits of task-centered activites. A successful task group is one in which the adults truly facilitate and allow students to run the project. The assumption of leadership by students allows leaders to focus on group functioning and maintenance of individual member benefits.

There are few pratical limitations to task specific groups. The major consideration is matching students with the task. Other factors are time, since these groups usually operate outside of school hours, and the cost of any materials involved. This type of group can be very desirable to support personnel because the activity is very visible and promotes support services. Other attractive factors are its suitability for all age groups and disabilities and the opportunity for a relatively short-term project.

Summary

The group approach can be used by teachers and support personnel to reach a wide variety of affective goals with students. Therapeutic factors generated by well-run groups will positively impact many of the emotional and behavioral needs presented in schools. Enhanced self esteem, improved communication skills, cooperative skills, and improved group behavior are common outcomes of group counseling, all of which would benefit any student.

Group's versatility enables it to be applied with all age groups and with all types of students. Practical aspects of application (number of members, types of students, meeting location, etc.) are the variables of implementation. Therapeutic aspects, the potential benefits of group for students, are constants present in all types of groups. The primary task of group leaders in schools is to manage the variables in ways that maximize each student's opportunity to receive the benefits present.

Teachers and support staff are also served by the flexibility of the group approach. Many levels of skill in group leadership can be accommodated. For beginners, many packaged highly structured group programs are available. As ease and confidence of leaders grow, levels and methods of structuring the experience can be individually determined.

These critical factors inherent in groups in the schools facilitate the student's educational objectives. Both preventive and remedial groups can provide the members with opportunities which enable them to gain self esteem, learn from each other, and develop social skills. Group practice in the schools have responded to the interpersonal and intrapersonal needs of students. By making evaluation a more integral component of the services, there is even a greater possibility for outcome accountability.

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Practical Considerations

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Abstract

This chapter will emphasize practical considerations in the implementation of group counseling in the schools. Later chapters will focus more on specific issues such as leadership skills, co-leadership, and stages of group development. Our hope is that by posing a series of questions, we can encourage the utilization of group counseling in the schools and the provision of more effective special education support services.

Considerations

Apart from obtaining training in group counseling (a number of training issues shall be addressed in later chapters) getting started is fairly straight forward. Initially, one must determine whether group counseling is considered to be a legitimate activity for the school-based practitioner. Is there a history of group work practice or does acceptance need to be developed? Initial resistence may stem from lack of previous exposure to the group work model and understanding of its efficacy. There may be those who believe that the group model is "too therapeutic" for school based interventions. Curriculum or scheduling procedures may limit the types of students available for group services. On the other hand, agency procedures may not allow support staff to continue contact with students once placed in special education programs. For example, priority may be placed on assessment activities while therapeutic services are provided by others.

Endemic barriers to the group work model include practitioner availability, type of programs served, support of classroom teachers, administrative permission, and availability of prospective students. For example, students in a self-contained room may be more easily "grouped" than students who are considered resource or are in numerous regular education classes.

Conversly, use of a group work approach may be accepted or even desired in many settings. Group work may, in fact, focus on variables which contribute to classroom success. The utility of offering theme groups on such topics as stress, low self-esteem, personal, or family dysfunction and social skills might have gained prior acceptance. Individual counseling may be viewed as more time consuming and less productive.

Why do groups? For the most part psychologists and social workers have held an individual orientation to understanding and altering human behavior. Recent trends, however, have focused more on the individual as they function within the social system. An exclusive focus on the individual without regard to the social context, deprives the practitioner of a great deal of information and therapeutic power. The advantages of maximizing the use of time is also obvious. Following are a number of reasons one might consider doing group work in the schools:

1. People are group oriented. We function within family groups, work groups, play groups, and educational groups. Group counseling is a natural extention of people's group orientation.

2. A corollary of the above is that human behavior does not exist in a vacuum. Our understanding of an individual's behavior and our ability to affect change through counseling is enhanced by understanding of the context within which the individual functions and develops. The counseling group may be considered a microcosm of the larger social system.

3. Group counseling encourages interpersonal learning in a way not possible during individual counseling. The individual learns by observing the behavior of others and attempts new behaviors within the context of a safe, supportive environment.

4. Group counseling provides the therapist or diagnostician with a rare opportunity to observe and gather diagnostic information otherwise unavailable. It also provides an opportunity to observe growth and change.

5. Groups give a sense of universality, that is that one's problems are not entirely unique but are shared by others. The feeling that "I'm not in this alone.", reduces one's sense of isolation and promotes a sense of security.

6. By revealing that one's problems are not entirely unique, a group can assist an individual by offering a sense of identity through shared interests, concerns, and goals. Group cohesiveness alone can have curative powers because it gives the individual a sense of belonging and importance to others.

7. Groups offer feedback in a way that is different from individual counseling. The group member is exposed to multiple sources of feedback, increasing the person's ability to accurately test reality, and to avoid defense mechanisms which impede change.

How do I get started? To assess the feasibility of a group work approach, start with informal discussions at the building administration and classroom teacher level. Their support is crucial to successful implementation. Teachers are usually receptive to this model and may, in fact, want to be involved in planning and co-leadership considerations. More often, teachers may view group as a means of resolving behavior management and control issues with specific students. Care should be taken not to promise absolute and quick change. The benefits of the group work model along with assurances of continuation of traditional services (e.g. assessments, program consultation, and individual counseling) should be stressed.

To create a climate of acceptance, planning to begin groups should include careful explanation of the nature of group counseling. Also, such issues as confidentiality and protection of self-esteem should be emphasized. Further, the practitioner should begin to develop the building staff's confidence level in their abilities by sharing past experience and training. If the practitioner is new to groupwork, adequate preparation is a primary concern.

What types of groups should I lead? To answer this question, one must be prepared to assess one's own professional competence and interests as well as the needs of children.

First, identify your own interests and expertise. An effective counselor must conduct a self inventory prior to initiating a program of group counseling. One needs to identify not only leadership strengths and weaknesses but specific interests, skills, and biases. Furthermore, the prospective therapist should evaluate their degree of comfort in addressing specific topics and issues or in working with specific populations of children. Effective and ethical practice requires such an appraisal, however, we are not suggesting something akin to Freudian self-analysis but rather that one explore each of the following critical areas:

A. *Competence or skill?* Has your training and/or experience provided you with the skills and knowledge about group counseling necessary to function as an effective and ethical leader? Interest alone is insufficient preparation for group counseling. Nor is a background limited to individual counseling. Counseling in groups requires skills and knowledge of group dynamics not required in individual counseling. Counseling groups often unleash strong emotions and conflicts among group members. Can you anticipate these eventualities and use them for constructive change? Or will lack of skill and self-confidence leave you unprepared to protect your charges from uncontrolled emotion and conflict?

B. *What are your specific interests?* Competent counselors can conduct groups dealing with a variety of topics, however, one will be more effective if one follows one's interests. Simply put, your motivation and, therefore, to an extent, your effectiveness will be a function of your interests. Also, you are more likely to have acquired specific skills in those areas.

C. *What are your biases?* Group leaders are not free from biases, nor should they be. However, the counseling group exists to assist students to deal with their concerns, anxieties, and other problems, and not for the counselor to express his or her biases or to indoctrinate students. Can you handle a given topic fairly, allow students to explore their feelings and ideas?

D. *What is your level of comfort in regards to specific topics, working with different age groups or with group counseling in general?* Self confidence and having "worked through" one's own hang-ups is essential before one can help youngsters do the same. Counseling groups cannot become arenas for leaders to resolve their own unresolved issues. Nor can they be places for the timid to risk losing control over the therapeutic process. If you are comfortable working with elementary school children but are uncomfortable working with high school behavior disordered students, clearly you must assess whether you are ready to handle an unstructured group with potentially combative teenagers. Are you comfortable as a leader dealing with the sexual concerns and problems of sexually active kids? How about suicidal ideation? Or physically abused children? Your discomfort may communicate to your group members that certain topics should be avoided or perhaps exaggerated for effect.

Which students are appropriate for the group experience? The second set of considerations in determining the types of groups one should offer are the needs and characteristics of the children themselves. Beginning counseling groups do not typically require elaborate needs assessment techniques. Within any school, one will find a large number of children in single or step parent families who have experienced divorce, children who are underachieving and discouraged, or children with self-esteem problems and so forth. If your building has a special education program you may even have a ready-made group with documented behavioral or social/emotional deficits. Grouping students with a commonality or universality of problems initially promotes group identity and purpose.

On the other hand, if your interest is in developing a counseling program which will efficiently and effectively meet the needs of the greatest number of students, then a more elaborate means of identifying student need is necessary. To gain a broader perspective, one could establish an advisory committee comprised of parents, teachers, and students. Committee members then could assist in determining student and system needs and whether those needs are being met. Student surveys and teacher surveys can offer another source of need identification. Surveys, however, may be of limited utility with younger children who are limited in their ability to identify and label their concerns.

Finally, one needs to recognize the parameters established by the school administration and community norms regarding what is or is not an acceptable topic or approach to group counseling. For example: Groups that deal with sexuality or substance abuse issues or that are confrontive in nature may be considered too contraversial. Although, veto power for group counseling services ideally should not rest in the hands of non-practioners, reality is that one must be concerned about their point of view if one is to practice one's profession at all. Additionally, school system policy may dictate that one provide services primarily or exclusively to special education students or students with specific needs.

How Shall I Structure My Groups?

Groups may be structured in response to a number of characteristics, including composition and size as well as specific topics and leader techniques or abilities. Group composition: composition of your group, that is, the characteristics of the participants, needs to be considered carefully as it may have a dramatic impact on the degree and nature of cohesiveness, trust, and understanding among group members. Certain topics may be more relevant to youngsters of one developmental stage than another. Subjects such as sexual activity, developing independence from parents, or seeking employment are appropriate for older adolescents. Due to attention span and developmental interests, older elementary children may be grouped separately from lower elementary children. Mixing youngsters with a broad age range will reduce the degree to which they share common concerns and experiences. Understanding and trust may not develop. Some issues may best be restricted to one gender, for example rape or sexual assault. It is important that youngsters understand each other's feelings and perceptions as well as the feeling that they share a common experience.

Occasionally, one may have the opportunity to lead an intact group of children such as a self-contained mental disabilities or behavior disorders class. This has certain advantages where the class is a "captive audience " with a degree of cohesion built in. Trust and understanding may have developed by virtue of a shared classroom experience. Conversly, not all youngsters identified as having a similar disability share all important characteristics for building a cohesive and effective group. Certain individuals may be detrimental to group process. The use of an intact class may force compromises which may be difficult to live with or potentially lead to individual exclusion at a later date. The potential group leader may want to clarify their right to exclude specific individuals prior to the group's inception and have contingency plans for dealing with inappropriate students while the group meets.

In general, one should strive for a balance between homogeneity and heterogeneity in selection of participants. True homogeneity is impossible to achieve and one should attempt to answer whether the group should be homogenious with respect to key personal attributes such as shared concerns, willingness to participate in discussion, age, and sex. Generally these decisions can be best answered within the context of keeping a balance between cohesiveness and diversity. Homogeneity tends to foster cohesiveness, but too much homogeneity may eliminate essential diversity and the balance that diversity contributes to discussion. Maintaining a balance is important.

Group size: This is another important structural consideration in forming a group. In general, we have found that groups of five to eight youngsters are an effective group size. This allows for a large number of potential interactions without allowing anonymity on one hand or loss of leader control on the other. The size of an effective group will vary with the age of the participants. Younger children typically function better in smaller groups. The degree of student motivation will have impact on whether they can sustain attention and participate in a large group setting. Group size is also related to the nature of topics discussed and whether a group is time limited or open ended. Use of a co-leader generally enables youngsters to function well within larger groups than possible with a single leader.

The Pre-Group Stage - Logistics

At this stage, the type of proposed group is fairly well defined, and the leader has a general idea of the potential members to be interviewed. Further, the leader has chosen a group model that is commensurate with their skills and yet meets the needs of the identified program or student population. Prior to the pre-group interview with prospective members, the group leader or co-leaders need to make decisions regarding time lines and scheduling.

How Long Should The Group Last?

It is important to clearly define the time limits of the group and communicate that to prospective members at the pre-group interview. The group's "life cycle", whether long term or short term is dependent on its design and purpose. Long term or open-ended groups are more conducive to the development of trust and cohesion and will facilitate progression to the working stage of group process. Short term or time-limited groups work better for specific activity or problem-focused purposes. Examples would be play skills, loss from death or divorce, and functional living skills. A practitioner just beginning their group experience may want to start with a more time-limited theme or activity group and plan each session carefully. Long term or open-ended discussion groups may require less session-to-session planning but more experience in group work process and knowledge base.

Where Should The Group Meet?

In choosing a location, the primary issue must be privacy. The setting for group meetings should ideally be quiet and removed from distractions such as other students or building staff. Disclosure and ability to focus on activities at hand will be enhanced. The physical structure of the room is also an important consideration. Its size will tend to dictate the kinds of behavior and activities that may occur. For some groups, the use of tables/chairs and a chalkboard may be preferable. For others, an open space with room to role play or sit in a circle free of distracting furnishings may be more appropriate. A meeting place in close proximity to the classroom may work better for lower elementary children. The group leader may want to accompany members to and from the meeting site. Opportunities for setting standards of structure and expected behavior will occur at this time. The location should be the same from one session to another. This reduces the potential for confusion and disorganization. In any case, the location should meet the needs of the group and be reliably available.

How Often and How Many Minutes Per Session?

The frequency of meetings is dependent on the type of group and other factors such as the age of students and availability of the group leader. A younger group may require shorter but more frequent meetings. Generally, younger students have shorter attention spans. A thirty-minute period may be a maximum productive expectation. Keep in mind that the time of day that the group meets can affect the overall adjustment of group members. Students may be missing a class or activity that will detract from the positive effects of group. It is a good idea to get subject area teacher's feedback before making a final decision. Also consider what coursework or activities the students proceed to after the meeting. With younger, excitable students, it may be advantageous to plan for group prior to lunch, recess, or the end of school. The frequency and length of group sessions is a determining factor in development of group cohesion and, subsequently, progression through stages of group process.

Pre-Group Interview

Ethically, a pre-group interview with each prospective student should be conducted and should be considered a must. This interview enables the counselor and student to firmly establish the goals of the group experience and the student's reasons for participating. The prospective group member has the right to be informed of all factors that might impact on them. This sharing allows the potential member to be involved in the decision to include or exclude them from the group. Members will then be able to prepare themselves for the upcoming group by thinking about what they want from the group experience and how they can gain from it.

The advantage of the interview to the leader or co-leaders is that they have the opportunity to determine whether the prospective member will fit in with the type of group being proposed. Will the group process be impeded by their participation?

Prospective members should be informed that parents or legal guardians will need to approve their participation and give written permission. Agency or oganizational guidelines will typically outline necessary procedures to be followed. In some cases, counseling services can simply be included in the child's Individual Educational Plan (I.E.P.). The practitioner should first contact legal guardians by phone or in person to discuss the reasons for their child's participation. Again, the broad purpose of the group should be explained along with the students' needs as they are related.

The literature suggests that certain personality types should be excluded from groups as they do not significantly benefit and can even be detrimental to the group. These types include the extremely disturbed or psychotic, brain-damaged, paranoid, extremely narcissistic, suicidal, or sociopathic personalities. For example, a group designed to work with shy and introverted students may not be appropriate for a highly distractible or hyperactive youngster.

It is the responsibility of the leader or leaders to inform the potential members of their right to confidentiality and later to establish group norms which all members are expected to adhere to. Generally, confidentiality implies that the leader will not violate their right to privacy unless the group leader believes that the student is in an emotional state where there is threat of physical danger to themselves or others. Also, members have the right to have "what is said in the group remain in the group". If a leader needs to discuss personal data relative to a specific group member with a parent or staff person, the member has the right to be informed prior to that time. Disclosure, openess, and group cohesion can be quickly destroyed by violation of this principle by either the leaders or other members. The principle of confidentiality needs to be discussed regularly during the group's duration.

Prior to beginning the group, appropriate school personnel should be notified of the purpose of the group, the meeting date, location, specific group members, and names of leader or co-leaders. This promotes good relationships between the special education and regular education staff. It also enhances the effectiveness of the group in that feedback and monitoring of progress outside of group can be maintained.

The First Meeting

As with most human endeavors, successful groups depend on planning and organization. Many of the pre-group planning and organization issues have been addressed above, however, such activities in reality do not end prior to the first session. The first session is as much a summary and conclusion to the pre-group activities as it is the start of the group proper.

During the first meeting, a number of things must be accomplished: review with the group the purpose of the group, individual and group goals, discussion of the group format, including types of activities and student responsibilities. Group members need to establish ground rules and norms including confidentiality and rules governing appropriate group behavior. The purpose of this review is to assure that each student shares common understanding of group process.

In the first session, the leader must establish a positive, goal orientation for the group. Enthusiasm is essential. Also, the leader must begin to establish a sense of comfort and trust within the group. Regardless of the age of participants, they will look to the leader for support and encouragement as well as assistance when conflict or anxiety increases. One must delineate leader and member responsibilities so that there will be less confusion regarding the roles each will play in life of the group.

In discussion of roles and group processes, reference to group and individual goals is essential. Students must be able to recognize that they have both common as well as individual goals. Establishment and maintenance of goals is essential to group function.

Each group session should include three phases: warm up, activity or discussion, and summary. A warm-up activity may include: review of the previous session and a determination of the first discussion topic. A summary or termination phase should occur at the end of each group session. The termination phase allows the leader to summarize what has been accomplished and to focus attention on what will occur during the next meeting. This helps students to view the group as productive and goal orientated. As the life of the group nears its end, participants need to know that they have a finite time in which to share and participate and to deal with unresolved issues and concerns. This allows group members to pace their participation based on individual needs.

Rules, Expectations, and Norms

Keeping in mind that rules, expectations, and norms will differ somewhat with the age, cognitive, and emotional maturity of participants, the following are offered as helpful guidelines:

Primary Level Children

1. Confidentiality
2. Participation will be encouraged but not forced.
3. Specific rules regarding behavioral self control with positive and/or negative consequences.
4. Appropriate talk (eye contact, taking turns, listening, and responding appropriately to what others say).

Intermediate Level Through High School

1. Confidentiality.
2. Participation will be encouraged but not forced.
3. Respect for self and others.
4. Physical self control.

In general, have few rules and keep them simple. Make sure that the students can identify specific instances of behavior which is consistant with or violates each rule. To an extent, rules and their parameters will evolve over time but some mutual understanding of the general parameters is necessary from the outset.

Confidentiality Re-emphasized

A specific comment on confidentiality. Effective group interaction requires trust which is established to a large extent on the understanding that what is discussed in group will not be shared with others outside of group. Without belief that discussion will be kept in confidence, students will not feel comfortable sharing revealing or anxiety-inducing thoughts and feelings. Also, students need to know the limits of confidentiality under which counselors operate such as breaking confidence when participants speak of commiting either suicide or homicide. The ways in which one may communicate necessary information to either teachers or parents must be discussed with participants so that they do not feel that one has "gone behind their backs" when communication is necessary.

Miscellaneous

Be aware that it is impossible to anticipate all of the factors that will come into play in setting up and leading a group. The preceding text attempts to delineate the primary considerations in this endeavor. Following are other miscellaneous things to ponder.

Since the group exists in the social milieu of the school environment, the prospective group leader will need to be at one and the same time reliable, flexible, positive, and communicative. Unforseen school activities and schedule changes will impact on the group. Be sure to consult school co-leaders and personal schedules when forming a group. Writing a general lesson plan with goals/objectives and session-by-session activities is highly recommended. This enables practitioners to have a clear idea of guidelines and timelines for group process. A lesson plan is also beneficial for record keeping, report writing, and implementing future groups. Sharing this plan with administrators and building staff enhances leader competence.

Practitioner reliability also implies that the group leader will be on time and dependable. Keep to the schedule.

Teachers and other staff who are under stress tend to react negatively if they have to provide unplanned lessons or activities. Absences can cause group process and progress of individual members to be adversely affected.

In terms of leadership skills, group facilitators are reminded that they don't have to be an all-knowing sage or a pontificating pain. Relax. If some aspect of group functioning is problematic, attempt to resolve it promptly. Don't procrastinate. Anxiety on the part of group leaders is easily telegraphed to others. Also, don't let your personal agenda or need to succeed get ahead of group process. Change usually occurs slowly over time. Learning occurs with group leaders as well as members. Again, don't press for success.

Being a group leader does not mean that responsibilities end at the termination of each session. Keep in contact with teachers, parents, and others around the children to monitor their progress and avoid potential problems. Try to be aware if a group member is having a bad day or there has been a problem at home.

The practitioner may want to occasionally feed the members or plan fun activities. These can be great reinforcers. Co-leaders should regularly schedule time to assess their working relationship in group, however, this will be dealt with in more depth in following chapters.

As previously stated, regular use of groups, especially when the special class teacher is involved, can increase one's visibility and improve credibility. The practitioner's effectiveness in other roles such as consultation, team meetings, and assessment is enhanced.

Summary

We have attempted here to elucidate some of the primary considerations in forming and leading a group. From evaluating one's own skills, expertise, and interests to assessing need for groups and finally determining appropriate group composition and holding the first meeting. This chapter is not meant to be an all encompassing treatise but a nucleous for "getting your feet wet" as it were. Various sayings and adages come to mind at this point: "sink or swim", "We have nothing to fear but fear itself". Expanding one's own skills into the arena of group work will require planning, preparation, and work but should be highly rewarding.

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Developmental Stages in Groups

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Abstract

This chapter briefly describes the accepted stages of group development--initial stage, transitional stage, and working stage. Conditions unique to public schools are presented as valid reasons for why school groups may struggle to reach the working stage. Traditional group stages are conceptualized differently in an effort to help practitioners write more meaningful individual and group goals.

Introduction

All group leaders should possess a working knowledge of the developmental stages of groups. This knowledge will help them to develop individual and group goals and assist them in guiding their group from beginning to end. Knowledge of group stages can be beneficial in helping the leader determine the current status and/or progress of a group.

While terminology often differs, there is much agreement among experts as to the stages through which a group passes (Yalom, 1975; Corey, 1987). Generally, groups progress through periods of orientation and tentativeness, conflict, and the eventual development of cohesion.

As leaders of groups in the schools, we are constantly assessing the stage at which our group is functioning. In theory, groups in the school setting should progress through the same major stages as other groups. However, in some groups, the development of cohesion and advancement to a working stage is very elusive. Much group time can be spent in dealing with conflict, discipline problems, or difficult members.

This chapter will provide an overview of the major group stages, discuss situations unique to groups in the schools which may impede the development of cohesion, and offer a new way to look at the stages of a group that may be more meaningful when writing goals.

Initial Stage

The first or initial stage of a group is marked by orientation issues, dependence on the leader, and tentativeness among members. Members begin to size one another up and attempt to put their best foot forward. They are curious, anxious, and fearful. They may wonder if they will be accepted by the other participants. They may be curious about what the group is all about or why they are involved in the group. There is also a search for similarities among members.

Tentativeness by the members is common during the initial meetings of a group. Members may be silent or feel awkward as they test the waters. Communication is restricted and superficial. The issues discussed are generally of little interest to members. Participants have a tendency to talk about other people as opposed to themselves. They may tell stories about other family members or friends to "stay safe" and keep the focus off of themselves.

During this stage members are very dependent upon the group leader. They seek his/her acceptance and approval. They look to the leader for answers. Members often engage in behavior that they believe will be approved of by the leader.

The goal of the leader in the beginning stage of a group is to begin to create a trusting environment, promote sharing, and encourage self-disclosure and other risk-taking behaviors. The development of group norms and rules is also important and should be determined democratically by the leader and the members. The leader will lay the foundation for the future development of group cohesion by meeting these early goals.

Transitional Stage

Before a group becomes cohesive and unified, it will pass through a stage marked by conflict, anxiety, and resistance. Many experts refer to this as the transitional stage.

During the transitional stage, conflict is considered to be inevitable. There is conflict between members as well as conflict between members and the leaders. Conflict among members may take the form of jealousy or rivalry as each individual begins to jockey for position. It may be manifested in negative comments directed at each other such as harsh criticism or "put downs". Members tend to offer advice, not because they care, but in an effort to take the pressure off themselves or make themselves look good.

The transitional stage is also marked by much anxiety. Members are not only fearful of what others will discover about them, but also they are fearful of what they may discover about themselves. Participants are frightened of being laughed at or rejected by others. Resistance is not uncommon during the transitional stage. Members are ambivalent whether to stay safe or take a risk.

Conflict often arises between the members and the leader. Group leaders may be challenged and confronted on both a personal and professional level. Members may be hostile toward the leader. Members may indicate that the group is boring or blame the leader for lack of group progress. The expectations that are placed on the leader by the members are so high, that the leader will almost always disappoint them. Conversely, members may vie for the leader's attention and to become the leader's "pet".

The role of the leader during the transitional stage is to caringly confront and challenge the conflict when it arises. The leader should be positive, supportive, and non-defensive. Only after conflict is resolved, can a group progress into a working stage.

Working Stage

Although cohesion begins to develop in the initial stage of a group, it becomes most evident now, following a period of conflict and its resolution. Cohesion strengthens throughout the life of a group as members get to know each other, develop trust, and share personally meaningful experiences. Only after cohesion is reached, can a group develop into a mature, advanced working group.

This stage of a group is often referred to as the working stage. When a group has progressed to a working stage, cohesion is high, trust among members is high, and there is less dependence on the leader.

There is a closeness among members as they feel they are united against the world. Members demonstrate cooperation and mutual support. Members possess common goals which are now clearer and more specific. There is a certain closeness and group spirit among the participants.

Members trust each other, and they trust the leader. There is a willingness to take risks and disclose personal experiences. Feedback is now given in a caring effort to help one another. Feedback is accepted without defensiveness as members attempt to learn to accept responsibility for their own behavior. Interactions are direct and spontaneous. There is much confrontation in an attempt to help each other.

A working group is also less dependent on the leader for structure and guidance. Members no longer need to look solely to the leader for guidance. The goal of the leader during the working stage is to reinforce and support group members for taking risks such as disclosing information. Continued use of leadership skills such as linking, clarifying, and interpreting is needed. Encouragement for behavior change outside the group setting is essential.

Group leaders want their groups to reach a working stage. The goal is to assist the group into becoming a cohesive, working unit because this is when effective change most often occurs. However, leaders often discover that even if a group never reaches a working stage, the group experience itself can be extremely valuable for students. For example, students may develop some group interactive skills or establish some new friendships. They may learn that other students have problems similar to their own. Certainly their involvement may pave the way for a more successful group experience in the future. That is, they would be more experienced, less anxious, and more aware of proper group behavior and group functioning. Although a particular group may never reach a working stage, it does not mean that the time spent in the group for the members was wasted.

There may be some very valid reasons why some school groups experience difficulty reaching a working stage. Many uncontrollable "physical" conditions can be encountered by a leader when conducting a school group. These conditions include attendance problems, development, location problems, and time limitations. All appear to impede the progress of group. "Member specific" factors such as management difficulties and developmental issues may also severely retard the development of cohesion within a group.

Attendance

Problems with attendance in school groups can greatly effect the development of cohesion. Attendance problems include issues such as high turnover rates, suspensions, sickness, and truancy.

High turnover rates seem to be most common when counseling special education classes of behavioral disordered special education classrooms. For example, if a student's behavior becomes more severe as the year progresses, he/she may be placed in a more restrictive setting such as a group home. This obviously terminates him from the school group. In addition, many behavioral disordered group members are often suspended from school or truant, and so are absent from many group sessions. Sickness or changes in scheduling may also lead to poor group attendance.

Another unique problem to special education groups is mainstreaming. Before a group begins, a day and period is usually chosen in which to conduct the group each week. During the course of a semester, a student may be mainstreamed into a particular class which only meets during scheduled group time. Consequently, the student must be dropped from the group to attend the mainstreamed class.

As the year progresses, students may be identified and placed in the B.D. program. Since the group is being conducted with the entire B.D. classroom, new placements are automatically included into the group. This creates much tension as old members do not feel they have input as to the joining of new members. Whether members are involuntarily terminated, absent from group due to suspensions or sickness, or are added throughout the course of the group, group process is inhibited, continuity is disrupted, and discussion of important issues is delayed.

I served as a leader of a B.D. group during one school year that had a very difficult time getting off the ground. In September, I began my group with eleven members. By Christmas break, many changes had occurred. One student was placed in a group home, one student stopped attending school, one student moved, and one student was placed on a homebound instruction program. Also, two new placements were added during the first semester. These changes, combined with several suspension and truancy problems, resulted in a group which never progressed much past an initial orientation stage.

Meeting Time/Place

An inconsistent weekly meeting time and place are two factors that can greatly slow down the development of cohesion within a group. Consistency in location and time help build trust and security and keep members from worrying about these issues so they can concentrate on bigger, more important issues. However, anyone working in a school system realizes that this is very difficult to accomplish on a week-by-week basis. Assemblies, late starts, unexpected occasions such as classroom parties or emergencies can all lead to the changing of a group meeting time. Similar situations may require the need to change weekly locations.

With certain intact classroom groups, meeting in a room other than the classroom may be beneficial. Different environments have different behavioral expectations. Perhaps a B.D. classroom that is managed daily in one room would function better as a group if removed from that classroom. However, psychologists and social workers in the schools rarely have their own room in which to meet, and the chances of obtaining a consistent weekly room is unlikely. Even if group is conducted each week within the classroom, many situations can arise to disrupt the weekly meeting times. A morning Christmas assembly may require group to be re-scheduled for the afternoon. An emergency with another student may cause a school psychologist or social worker to cancel a group altogether. Occasionally, support staff may only be scheduled for a particular school one day a week. If they happen to be ill on the day they are in this school, group may be skipped for an entire week.

One Thursday, I was preparing for my group after missing the previous week's meeting due to illness. Because our group had not met for two weeks, I was anxious about getting started. Shortly thereafter, I discovered my co-leader had taken a personal day, three of the group members were absent due to one reason or another, and there was scoliosis screening in the gymnasium during our normally scheduled group time. Needless to say, group was re-scheduled for a later date.

Cancelling groups and changing locations or meeting times are not simply small "hassles" that leaders must deal with when working in the schools. These situations disrupt group consistency and slow down the entire group process. While often group leaders may have limited control over these conditions, it is important to try to hold to a routine (time and place) when conducting a group.

Room Privacy

The inability to provide a room free from interruptions can quickly disrupt the group and slow down the development of cohesion. Trust, security, and cohesiveness are difficult enough to establish under ideal circumstances, let alone circumstances in which a group is subjected to continuous intrusions and disruptions. Providing a safe, secure, and private setting will help promote disclosure and risk taking.

In the school setting, it is sometimes difficult to secure a private room. Meeting in an office off the library with big glass windows, behind partitions in the basement, or in a corner of the cafeteria is not uncommon. Even if meeting in a classroom, the principal, teachers, secretaries, or other students, for some reason, have a tendency to enter the room. During a meeting participants must believe that no outsider can hear them while they feel vulnerable. If members do not feel safe from outsiders, they may stop volunteering information, become frustrated, or begin to blame the leader for not being able to provide the proper environment. These situations all delay cohesion, and the eventual progression into a working stage.

In one group which I led, the school principal occasionally wandered in to observe the group meeting. Imagine trying to get students to disclose information with the principal as an on-looker. In another group, we met in the same room that contained the copy machine. Occasionally, teachers would politely "sneak" in to make a quick copy.

During the life of a group, a particular individual may want to observe. The possibility of having a visitor or observer should be discussed democratically with a group. Members need to believe it is "their" group and that they have part of the decision regarding who can and cannot visit. When a visitor is invited into the group, have him/her sit in the group circle instead of observing from the outside. This will decrease the likelihood that the group will feel judged by the visitor.

Time

Time constraints can cause problems when conducting groups in the schools. Sometimes emergencies arise for a leader. Consequently, he/she may need to cancel a group meeting. Occasionally shortened schedules, late starts, or afternoon pep assemblies may cause a group to be cancelled, shortened, or re-scheduled.

Most often, limited time and tight schedules affect the planning and processing time that is required when running a group. It is essential that co-leaders spend time before a group or setting goals for the upcoming session and reviewing important issues of the previous session. In addition, co-leaders need to meet immediately following a session to process information and begin to plan for the following week.

Despite the importance of processing, leaders are often too busy to take the necessary time required for this activity. It is twice as difficult to find planning time when there are co-leaders because the schedules of two busy professionals are involved. When proper time is not available for leaders to plan or process, they are more indecisive and tentative and less effective at guiding the group and assisting students in meeting their goals. Consequently, group process or development may be hindered.

I co-led a B.D. group with a special education teacher for one semester. While we both had good intentions, due to our schedules, we rarely met before or after a session, due to our schedules. Consequently, in group situations we were hesitant, not sure of our direction, and poor at working together as leaders. Unfortunately, we did not realize this until after the fact. During the life of our group, we had a tendency to blame the members for lack of progress, when in reality, we caused a lot of the problems.

Discipline

Behavioral difficulties or discipline problems within a group can be one of the biggest destroyers of group progress. It frustrates and angers the leader, disrupts group continuity, and impedes the overall progress of a group. Fighting, swearing, put downs, interruptions, and talking back are just a few of the situations as leaders encounter in group situations--especially groups involving behavioral disordered students. When a majority of group time is spent on dealing with management issues, leaders begin to question the effectiveness of their group as well as the effectiveness of themselves as leaders.

The severity of discipline problems differ in regard to what population of students are involved in a particular group. However, it seems every group has some initial behavioral difficulties which need to be worked through. Only intensity and frequency varies. Whatever the type of group, these issues must be addressed. In a group with few problems, behavior may be addressed as it occurs by bringing it to the attention of the group. In more severe groups, strict control through behavior management programs may need to be utilized.

Developmental Issues

The maturity level or developmental level of individual group participants is a major determinant of future group cohesion. Building relationships and developing trust are complex processes. Mature adults often experience difficulty with these issues. Still, we expect school-age children to quickly become comfortable with one another in a group setting and tell all their inner-most secrets. Some thought must be given as to whether groups involving elementary students, immature students, or mentally disabled students could ever reach the type of working stage that is described by the experts.

Many of the students with whom we work possess emotional difficulties or are part of dysfunctional families. Some of the students have never been involved in a trusting relationship with anyone - including their parents. Sometimes I need to take a step back and realize that my group of immature, emotionally disturbed, behaviorally disordered students from dysfunctional families may not reach a working stage as quickly as I may like.

A New Nomanclature

The ultimate goal of a group leaders is to reach an advanced working stage. We become easily frustrated if we are not making consistent progress towards this goal. As discussed earlier, there are several unique situations in the public school setting which hinder the progress of a group. Some of these situations we can improve, some we cannot control. Group stages are ill-defined and somewhat abstract. Consequently, it is sometimes difficult to assess progress and to produce individual and group based goals. Perhaps a more concrete way to view group stages would be easier to follow and more conducive to goal writing for those of us working in public schools.

The first stage of our new group could focus on teaching the participants to become successful group members. Many students selected to participate in counseling groups, especially behaviorally disordered students, lack the necessary skills required to successfully function as group members. Consequently, many behavioral problems occur. In this stage, focus is placed on teaching students the following: how to listen, how to take turns speaking, how to keep their hands to themselves, how to give eye contact and demonstrate other proper body language when listening or speaking, how to stay on a topic, how to respect others' judgments, and how to follow basic group rules, etc.

Teaching students to become successful group members may be the hardest stage through which to progress. In this stage of the group, the leader may need to provide much structure to the weekly group meetings. This may involve engaging the group in structured activities or discussing pre-determined topics. Also, structured behavior modification systems utilizing charts and points or other rewards are helpful in this stage. In addition to individual contingencies, group contingencies should be utilized in an effort to propel members into working together as a unit.

A group must get past this basic management/discipline stage before it can successfully progress into a productive unit. Consequently, much effort must be spent in this area.

Group leaders can become easily frustrated when, due to discipline problems, their groups never reach the discussion of important issues. In reality, it may take a complete school year of teaching and practicing these basic skills before members are ready for this task. Instead of becoming frustrated or possibly even angry at a group which is experiencing some behavior problems, a leader should understand that often students who misbehave in a group may do so because they are not aware of proper behavior. Instead of viewing misbehavior as non-compliance, view it is an opportunity to teach appropriate behavior.

After a student meets his/her goals of becoming a successful group member, leader focus and goals can be on that member becoming a cohesive group member. Members have now passed through the first stage and should be able to give good eye contact, speak during natural breaks in the conversation, and follow the rules of the group. During the cohesive group member stage, participants should be demonstrating some group spirit, accepting other member's opinions, and beginning to develop some trust. Members may begin to start disclosing personal information.

After some cohesion has developed, the leader can help guide students through the third stage into becoming productive group members. Only after students are taught how to successfully function in a group and only after some cohesion has begun to develop can members develop the necessary skills required to help themselves and others effectively change.

In this stage, the leader becomes less structured and begins to allow students to bring up and discuss their own issues. Focus is placed on helping the student recognize his/her feelings and the feelings of others, understand his/her feelings, express his/her feelings, and accept and offer feedback. This stage is similar to the working stage.

The proposed language may appear no more clearly delineated than that of the more traditional language used to discuss group development. However, when goal writing, this language may help the leader produce more meaningful goals for the participants; goals which progress through following rules, disclosing personal information, providing feedback to others.

Summary

It is important for group leaders to possess a basic knowledge of traditional group stages. However, leaders should not become apprehensive about whether their group is progressing through these stages appropriately. Although a group may not progress into an advanced working stage, inclusion in the group can still be highly beneficial for the student. If nothing else, the student may be less anxious about participating in a group in the future.

Leaders may begin to question their own skills when their groups make limited progress, but there are some very valid reasons why some groups conducted in a school setting progress slowly. Poor attendance, time limitations, or room unavailability--situations of which we have no control--may impede the progress of a group. Management difficulties and developmental issues may also affect group process.

One of the biggest errors we can make as leaders is to expect too much from the group and ourselves too soon. Expect minimal gains--if any at all. Eight or nine months of work may sometimes result in only limited progress at best.

As group leaders, we need to be careful in developing group and individual goals. Do not expect students to meet goals of expressing feelings or giving feedback if they do not know how to listen, give eye contact or take turns talking. Plan to make a student a successful group member before he becomes a working group member, ready to take responsibility for his/her own behavior and attempt to change for the better. A student needs to learn how to function in a group before he will be able to change as a result of the group.

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Leadership Skills

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Abstract

Leadership in group process is a concept which incorporates personal attributes, general approach or style, as well as specific skills. The author outlines recent research regarding leadership functions and effectiveness in different types of groups. Specific leadership skills are then described as they relate to the stages of group development. Practical considerations in applying these skills are discussed.

Introduction

A great deal has been written about leadership skills in the group counseling process. The purpose of this chapter is to discuss the practical application of specific leadership skills for the practitioner in the school setting. In order to make this material pragmatic and useful, the author will briefly outline recent research regarding leadership behavior and then will discuss specific skills as they pertain to the stages of group development. The author does not allege that these skills are exclusive to any one stage of group development but has chosen skills which appear to most closely parallel the characteristics of each stage.

Counseling groups in the schools vary considerably in format, ranging from structured, social-skills groups, to more therapeutically oriented "talk groups". The author recognizes that the implementation of leadership skills may vary to some extent, depending upon the nature of the group. However, all groups move through stages of development, and the basic skills described below can be applied to a wide range of group models.

Background and Recent Research

The global function of the group leader has been described by numerous authors. Yalom (1975) states that "The therapist's job is to create the machinery of therapy, to set it in motion, and to keep it operating with a maximum of effectiveness." Pines, et. al. (1982) describe the leader as one who "activates and mobilizes that which is latent in the group...helping the members become active participants in the process of group maturation through which individual change takes place". Both of these descriptions emphasize the issue of group process which differentiates individual therapy from group therapy.

How does the leader set this machinery in motion? What specific skills and behaviors does he/she need to demonstrate? A review of recent literature reveals some interesting data regarding leader behavior as it relates to the progress of members in group therapy. Anderson (1984) states, "What leaders do in specific situations does not make a significant improvement in group process. Rather, the leader's general stance and style has an impact on the group for good or ill." Research by Lieberman, et. al. (1973) describes four basic leadership functions which contribute to an overall style:

1. Emotional stimulation
2. Meaning attribution
3. Caring
4. Executive function

In Lieberman's research, effective leaders are defined as those with groups of high changers and few casualties. Analysis revealed that these effective leaders were high in caring and meaning attribution and moderate in use of emotional stimulation and executive function.

Caring was a central function in member's growth. This factor has been described by many authors as empathy, unconditional positive regard, and genuine concern. Yalom (1975) states that "underlying all consideration of technique, there must be a consistent, positive relationship between therapist and client." This relationship will correlate closely to the caring behaviors demonstrated by the group leader. Many specific skills reflect this caring including: active listening, reflecting feelings, and supporting.

Meaning attribution refers to the cognitive development of insight into self, others, and the group. This function was also determined to be critical to member's growth. Leaders use a variety of skills to highlight individual and group process including: interpretation, clarification, feedback, linking, suggesting, and goal setting.

Emotional stimulation describes the leader's ability to catalyze the expression of feelings in the group. This can be facilitated by the use of modeling and self disclosure. Leaders using a moderate level of these skills will have the most effective results. Both too little and too much emotional stimulation contribute to negative outcomes. Research by Lewis and Mider (1973) found that leaders who focus on feelings in the "here and now" are more successful than leaders who encourage discussion of topics and goals. These "experiential" groups were more cohesive and showed earlier improvements in the client's presenting symptoms. Research on leader's self disclosure also revealed a curviliner relationship. Minimal levels of leader openness were related to low levels of trust, while high levels of disclosure caused leaders to be viewed as unstable, weak, and less sensitive (Morran, 1982).

Executive function refers to leader behavior which directs the group. The leader may set limits or goals, manage time, and provide structured activities or exercises. Another way to describe this leadership function is on the continuum of autocratic to democratic styles. Research by Ohlson (1970) and Ward (1985) describe the autocractic leader as one who defines his/her goals and facilitates group movement toward them. The democratic leader, on the other hand, helps the members define their own goals and then facilitates action toward them. The effectiveness of either style relates to the type of group and its goals. A group seeking quantitative results will perform better with an authoritarian leader, while a group whose goal is more qualitative in nature, will function best with a democratic leader. Either end of the continuum presents difficulties. A highly autocratic style is correlated with lower levels of member morale and an extremely laissez-faire style does not provide the basic security for the foundations of a group culture. A moderate amount of control over group process has been shown to improve cohesion, increase member involvement, and increase the likelihood that members will be more competent in other social groups (Gruen, 1977 and Rose, 1974).

These four leadership functions and the specific skills described above all contribute to the ultimate goal of individual growth. For a detailed description of a wide selection of leadership skills the reader is referred to Theory and Practice of Group Counseling: Second Edition (1985) by Gerald Corey. Twenty-two distinct skills are reviewed in chapter three. Other authors have outlined similar skills, but Corey's review is felt to be the most extensive. The author has chosen among these skills and will highlight several as they may apply to the stages of group development.

Leadership Skills

In reviewing the numerous leadership skills, several were clearly a part of the group process from beginning to end. The author found ACTIVE LISTENING, REFLECTING FEELINGS, and CLARIFYING to be useful skills through all stages of group development. ACTIVE LISTENING involves paying complete attention to the content, voice, and body language of the person speaking. It also entails communicating to that person that you are really listening through your physical and emotional presence. The leader's eye contact, posture, and facial expression are all crucial variables. If the leader communicates a judgmental attitude or careless manner, even though he/she is listening carefully, the development of trust will be impaired. Jacob, et. al. (1988) state that "This skill, perhaps more than any other, is essential for good group leadership." The author has found that active listening most clearly communicates the message of caring to group members. It is also much more difficult than it appears. A good listener must be aware of the underlying messages as well as the content being communicated by all group members, and at the same time, monitor his/her own behavior. This requires intense concentration and energy.

REFLECTING FEELINGS is the skill of responding to the essence of what a person has communicated. The leader may paraphrase a comment or comments made by one or more members. The purpose of reflecting is twofold: (1) to convey to the member that you understand both the content and feeling level of his comment; and (2) to help the group member become more aware of what he is saying. An example of this was observed in an adolescent girls' group. One member described her embarassment after revealing a highly personal experience. When the leader restated and emphasized her sense of vulnerability, the student elaborated on the trust she was placing on group members and reminded them of the "confidentiality" rule.

CLARIFICATION involves a similar goal, helping a group member become more aware of what he is trying to say, or helping members communicate more accurately. This can be accomplished in several ways: (1) by asking an open-ended question to gather more information about a statement, (2) by restating a message in order to highlight key issues, or (3) by redirecting a vague statement to the intended recipient. By clarifying confusing messages, the leader will build trust and lead the student to a deeper level of self-exploration. Confusing messages create frustration and drain group energy. For example, in a high school group, one member stated that he felt disliked and lonely in the group. The leader asked if he was talking to anyone in particular in the group, and a confrontation ensued between two members. Clarification can also be useful when dealing with silence. The leader may ask for the meaning of a silence or ask "What's going on for you right now?"

When reviewing the initial stage of group development, the most frequent characteristics include: minimal risk taking, norm setting, and high levels of anxiety. The leader attempts to build trust and group cohesion and may be fairly active in facilitating and directing the group. MODELING is an important leadership skill in the early stages of group development. Corey (1985) states that "one of the best ways to teach desired behaviors is by modeling those behaviors in the group". The leader demonstrates effective communication, listening, and problem-solving skills. In early group stages, the leader may wish to model self disclosure, as members may be unwilling to risk openness. These self disclosures need not be intensely personal but can demonstrate how to disclose and share yourself with the group. During a particularly quiet group session, the leader may share his/her feelings about the silence, for example, "I want to share how I'm feeling about group today. It seems that we are all holding back, and I'm not sure why. I am becoming frustrated. Does anybody else feel the same way?"

Another leader task in the initial stage is GOAL SETTING. By planning specific goals for the group process and helping members define meaningful goals, the leader will set some direction for group development. A confusing, boring, or unproductive session may result in goals which are not clearly defined. During the second session of an elementary group of behavior disordered youngsters, the leader initiated a discussion of individual goals. The students continued on to discuss why they had been placed in special education and their goals for returning to regular classes. The leader was then able to tie their personal behavioral goals to the more global group goals. This discussion also led to a sense of commraderie and universality among members.

Due to the limited trust and heightened anxiety of the initial stage,the leader will also frequently use the skill of SUPPORTING. Supporting members can take the form of encouragement or reinforcement of desired behaviors. The leader wants to create an atmosphere where members will take risks and feel less anxiety about sharing personal feelings or ideas. Support can be communicated verbally or with the warmth of vocal inflection or touch. During an adolescent group session, one particularly quiet member voiced her anxiety over an upcoming operation. The leader commented on her openness and courage in trying out a new and difficult behavior while reaching over to touch her arm.

When the group moves into the transition stage, members become more defensive and a struggle for control may ensue. Conflicts between members and with the leader may emerge. The leader's primary task is to challenge members to resolve conflicts and face their own resistance. The leader continues to be fairly active in this stage. One skill used frequently in transition is FEEDBACK. Giving feedback involves sharing observations and personal perceptions of member's behavior. The goal is to increase the member's self awareness by offering an external and realistic view of how the person appears to others. John Anderson offers several excellent "rules of thumb" for giving feedback in Counseling Through Group Process (1984): "(1) Feedback must stem from a concern for the other and a desire to improve your relationship with him/her, or the group: (2) Feedback should be descriptive rather than evaluative whenever possible. (3) Feedback should be specific rather than general. (4) Feedback should be well timed. (5) Feedback should be directed toward behavior which the receiver can do something about. (6) Feedback should be checked out." There are two basic ways to share feedback: by describing one's own feelings or by describing one's own perception of the other's behavior. In an adolescent girls' group, the leader provided both aspects of feedback after one member continued to whisper asides during another member's self disclosure. The leader stated, "You're still whispering to Linda while Kathy is telling us something that is important to her. I'm feeling frustrated."

Another skill used frequently during the transition stage is BLOCKING. Blocking refers to an intervention which stops counterproductive behaviors within the group. The leader needs to be aware of behaviors which should be blocked and then must develop the skill of stopping the specific behavior without attacking the person. Corey outlines several behaviors which require blocking in Theory and Practice of Group Counseling (1985): scapegoating, group pressure, interrogating, storytelling, gossiping, advice giving, rescuing, or excuse making. The leader in a junior high group blocked a communication when one member began reporting the most recent gossip on another member who was absent from group. When blocking or cutting off a member's communication, it is often helpful to explain to members why you are stopping what is happening. For example, in the incident mentioned above, the leader first said, "I need to interrupt a minute because Donna is absent today, and I'm wondering how this story affects you directly." Phrases such as "Let me stop you a minute...Let me jump in here...Can you hold that a minute..." all block communication quickly and provide a way to refocus a conversation without alienating members.

Due to the amount of conflict and resistance which are part of the transition stage, leaders often need to use CONFRONTATION. The leader will challenge a group member to look at discrepancies between words and actions and point out conflicting messages. The goal of confrontation is to encourage honest communication and bring about awareness of self contradictions. Like giving feedback, confrontation must be done in a caring manner and in such a way that the person has ample opportunity to consider what has been said. It is best presented as a tentative hypothesis, such as: "Could it be that...? It is possible that...?" During a high school group, one student indicated a desire to belong to the group but then stated that she was unwilling to share any personal information. She indicated willingness to "help" others but stated that she did not want to talk about herself. The leader asked her about "belonging" and pointed out that she was showing mixed feelings about joining the group. Other students immediately jumped in and began sharing their feelings about her lack of personal commitment to the group and encouraged her to share more personally if she truly wanted to belong. Her resistance became more obvious and could be dealt with directly.

If the conflicts and resistance of the transition stage are met and resolved, the group moves into the working stage. This is characterized by high levels of cohesion, self exploration, disclosure, and lowered anxiety. The key tasks of the leader in this stage are to foster productive personal work, encourage deeper self awareness, and focus on translating insight into action.

One leadership skill which is useful during the working stage is LINKING. Linking is designed to promote group interaction by connecting members in terms of their similarities. The leader attempts to find common themes that provide universality and link one or more members' work with that of others in the group. Similar phrases, feelings, thoughts, and experiences can be highlighted to produce a sense of "we-ness" and cohesion. During the working stage, this linking allows individual members to work on personal issues, yet feel connected to other group members. In an elementary group of hearing impaired younsters, a number of students had discussed their feelings of "differentness" and isolation both at home and school. When the leader noted this similar theme, the children appeared surprised that others felt the same way and seemed more cohesive as a group for some time.

Another leadership skill used frequently during the working stage is INTERPRETATION. The leader offers possible explanations for a member's behavior, feelings, or thoughts to encourage deeper self exploration and provide a new perspective. The leader offers an interpretation as a tentative hypothesis, for if offered too soon or in a dogmatic way, the member may become defensive or overly dependent on the leader to provide insight. Interpretations can be offered on individual member issues or can be offered regarding group process. The leader may use interpretation to highlight how a "here and now" issue between two members may parallel an issue repeated in the member's life outside of group. For example, in an adolescent group, one member began to discuss how he felt "picked on" by several group members. This theme had often been repeated, and the leader was aware that similar statements had been made about various classmates, neighborhood peers, and family members. The leader asked the student to think about other places he felt the same way. When this was discussed in some depth, the leader offered the tentative interpretation that this student seemed to feel "picked on" nearly everywhere and that he might want to consider the idea that perhaps others were not "down" on him as much as he was "down" on himself and expecting negative outcomes.

As was stated previously, one goal of the leader during the working stage is to translate insight into action. Members begin to acquire ideas for new behaviors and may practice them in group, but if that behavior never generalizes to the outside world, there seems to have been minimal progress. This is when the skill of SUGGESTING becomes important. Suggesting involves the offering of information, direction, and ideas for new behavior. The leader hopes to help members develop alternative courses in thinking and action. It can take numerous forms such as giving "home work assignments" or suggesting specific plans of action. The leader does not have to provide these ideas directly but may encourage interaction from other group members. This skill can be overused if it becomes advice giving and may encourage dependency. However, members can view their "assignments" as experiments they might try outside of the group and then report back to the group the results both positive and negative. This can provide more realism to the group and allow members a supportive environment to return to after practicing difficult and new behaviors in the outside world. The author recalls an incident from an adolescent girls' group when one member had been encouraged to try a new mode of communication with her alcoholic parent. When she returned to the group the following week, she reported no significant change in her mother's behavior but noted that she felt less depressed and more hopeful about her own immediate future.

As the group winds down into the final stage, members often begin to pull back and participate less. There may be some sadness and anxiety over separation issues. The leader will need to provide a structure that allows members to recall what they have learned and generalize it to everyday life situations. The skill of TERMINATING refers to this preparation process. The leader assists members in assimilating what they have learned and applying it to their lives. Another aspect of this skill involves handling group process issues. The author has observed a variety of reactions to the end of counseling groups. Some groups seem to initiate the termination process weeks before the leader is ready or timelines indicate it is necessary. Other groups strongly resist terminating and make plans for follow-up activities to end their contract. The leader needs to be responsive to these reactions and discuss these perceptions with the group. A number of issues can influence a group's response to termination. For example, in one adolescent group which had been in existence for nearly five years, not only was the group ending for the year, but two members were moving out of the area. This group began to terminate several weeks before the leader had planned to initiate termination activities. Of their own accord, the members began to pull away from each other and resisted any further work. The leader then moved directly into more structured activities designed to draw closure to the group. The final aspect to the termination process involves the skills of EVALUATION and FOLLOW-UP. Too often, we dismiss groups without ever thoroughly evaluating their progress or easing members into "life without a support system". Members should be provided with suggested sources for further help, and leaders should be available for individual consultation should the need arise in the future.

Summary

This chapter has discussed the role of the leader in group process and specific skills pertinent to the stages of group development. Most of these skills are useful throughout the group's development but were chosen to highlight stages where they may be used most frequently. All of these skills, however, cannot make a group leader effective. As was stated early in the chapter, a leader's general style has the greatest impact on group progress. Leaders need to evaluate their own style and how they provide the four basic leadership functions: (1) Caring (2) Meaning (3) Structure and (4) Emotional Stimulation to their groups. These skills will only assist the leader in developing and operating the machinery of therapy.

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Teacher As Co-Leader

Kathleen Peterschmidt

Abstract

The dual role of the teacher serving as a counselor can lead to more supportive and cooperative relationships with students. Teachers need to be properly trained and aware of the advantages and disadvantages of serving in this dual role position.

Co-leadership is an efficient way to lead counseling groups. Teachers as co-leaders gain skills that are effective in the group and in the classroom. Cooperative, respectful co-leaders model effective relationship skills for the counseling group. Compatibility of the co-leaders is very important for the success of the group.

Teacher as a Counselor

Many teachers have found themselves in the dual role of teacher and counselor sometime during their careers. The situation may have been a one-time session with a behavior-problem student or the teacher may have assisted his/her class through the grieving process due to the death of a fellow student. With the new state mandate that requires Iowa schools to provide counseling services for all grades, teachers may find themselves placed more often in a counseling role.

The counseling programs designed by each school district can include therapeutic and instructional counseling services. Therapeutic counseling services involve exploration of personal issues. Instructional counseling services may follow curriculums which teach intra and/or interpersonal skills. Both types of counseling services can be conducted with groups of students or with individuals. Time factors, numbers of students, budget limits, and staff numbers make counseling groups appealing to school districts. Counseling groups also are effective because they represent the real world. We live in groups, and we learn in groups.

If the district plans to utilize teachers in dual roles as teachers and as counselors, several factors must be determined first. What types of teachers will make effective counselors? What training do these teachers need to assure an effective program, and if counseling groups are planned, the third factor to be considered is leadership. Should our teachers lead and/or co-lead counseling groups? What makes for effective (co-) leaders?

Determining which teachers will make competent counselors is an important task administrators must not overlook. Morse, et al (1980) believes that the state of a teacher's mental health is a crucial factor in affective education. A person who has not dealt with his/her own personal issues will have difficulty helping others with theirs. Even though a teacher is excellent at teaching, this does not mean that he/she will be good at working with children and their emotions (Holmes, Holmes, and Field, 1974).

Teachers need to be evaluated to determine their effectiveness as counselors. Ligon and McDaniel (1970) suggest three areas to be evaluated: the teacher's attitudes towards students, the teacher's goals, and the teacher's personal characteristics which contribute to good counseling. An effective teacher/counselor attends to the personal, social, and emotional needs of students. He/she develops relationships of acceptance, understanding, and respect with students. The goals of the teacher/counselor focus on the cognitive and affective development of the total individual. The characteristics of the teacher/counselor are those of one who respects the self-worth and dignity of each individual. He/she respects the right of the individuals to work out their own destiny even if it is in conflict with the teacher/counselor's values. To be effective as a teacher/counselor, Ligon and McDaniel (1970) believe that this person must have or be willing to seek therapeutic counseling to work on his/her own personal issues.

When answering the question "What makes for effective co-leadership?" one needs to look at the issue of teamwork. Potts (1985) studied the effectiveness of teachers working as teams. She found teams to be effective due to their efficiency, strength, back-up support, and the great wealth of resources and skills available. She also found that teachers worked better together as a team when they liked each other. Other factors that made teams work were a feeling of shared commitment and a sense of what they were working towards was worthwhile.

Anderson (1982) designed a training program that prepared counselors for leading counseling groups. The training program was short and developed the special skills needed to handle various kinds of problems encountered in group work. The trainees practiced the new skills by actually leading groups during the training sessions. The training sessions also prepared group leaders to be sensitive to various group member's behaviors. Each trainee received feedback on his/her strengths and weaknesses as group leader. This type of training program allows the counselor-in-training to learn about the kinds of persons groups will serve and the various situations for which special techniques would be appropriate.

Paradise and Siegelwaks (1982) discussed the need for ethical training for group leaders. They felt that training should involve general moral dilemmas that are common to group work as a method to enhance the ethical responsibilities of group leaders. Discussions of major issues such as leadership issues, screening potential group members, confidentiality, and out-of-group relationships can also assist in determining ethical responsibilities. When ascertaining the ethics involved in various situations, the problem solving approach can be quite helpful. Identify the problem, determine what ethical guidelines exist, generate possible and probable courses of action, and then select the best course of action.

Ethics training, group leadership skills, and teamwork are very important factors that make up part of the counselor-training program. The advantages and disadvantages of having teachers serve as counselors should also be examined during the counselor-training program.

There are some definite advantages to having teachers serve in the dual role of teacher/counselor. When a teacher counsels with students, he/she has more opportunity to know the student better. This knowledge can make it easier for the teacher to instruct students that he/she otherwise might not have been able to reach. Research has shown that when a teacher duplicates the trusting, accepting atmosphere of the counseling sessions into the classroom, more learning takes place (Ligon and McDaniel, 1970).

Gordon (1956) wrote a great deal about the use of teachers as counselors. He found that when teachers were trained to be counselors they became more sensitive to feelings being expressed in the classroom and were able to do a better job of teaching. As the teacher became more aware of feelings in a counseling situation, the better he/she was able to provide a trusting atmosphere in which the students could explore their issues.

In a workshop presented on group counseling in the schools, the effectiveness of using teachers as co-leaders in counseling groups was discussed (O'Dell, et al., 1986). The teacher often has already an established relationship with the students and may have a keener awareness of the relationships among group members. Therefore, the teacher/counselor may be able to more accurately understand student's comments and behaviors during group sessions. He/she may also be more aware of precipitating events that are exhibited as mood changes during group sessions.

When the teacher serves in the dual role of teacher/counselor, positive results occur. The counseling skills can help improve the classroom atmosphere. The relationship the teacher has with students in the classroom can also enhance the counseling sessions. There are benefits for teachers serving as counselors.

But, there are also difficulties that arise when a teacher serves as counselor. The major difficulty is role confusion. A teacher judges, evaluates, disciplines, and corrects inaccurate statements. As a counselor, the teacher must switch to a role where he/she listens and accepts without evaluating. Instead, the counselor assists the client in evaluating his/her own self (Ligon and McDaniel, 1970). Holmes, Holmes, and Field (1974) found that many teachers had difficulty unlearning habits and attitudes used in the classroom. Those teachers who had little difficulty shifting roles were the more effective teachers. Gordon (1956) suggest that teacher/counselors need to clarify their job descriptions as teacher and as counselor. By looking for similarities between teaching and counseling, one can resolve much of the role confusion.

Reality limits also presents difficulty for the teacher in a dual role as counselor. A teacher/counselor's time and energy is limited. He/she in reality cannot meet all the demands that students place on them. A teacher/counselor is also not responsible for the solution to each child's problems. The limit of ability is an important factor. Referrals should be made when a counseling situation is out of teacher/counselor's ability range. Time is also at a limit. The teacher/counselor must determine when and where counseling will occur or some students may seek limitless time (Gordon, 1956).

Co-Leadership

Recently, it has become more common to run counseling groups with two leaders or co-leaders. When planning counseling groups, it is vitally important to be aware of the significance of choosing a compatible co-leader. The wrong co-leader can be disasterous to the counseling group.

The willingness to make a commitment to plan and cooperate throughout the group process is one of the most essential factors in choosing a co-leader. (Jacombs, Harvill, and Masson, 1988). When both leaders commit to working together for the benefit of the members, the group process flows more consistently and is more productive for the members.

Stockton and Morran (1982) studied the skills and openness of co-leaders. They found that co-leaders who exhibited effective counseling skills were able to develop cohesion in groups sooner than in groups where only one leader had effective skills. They leaned that one leader's skills do not compensate for the lack of the other. Studies also showed that co-leaders who felt comfortable with each other demonstrated more self-expression and openness during group sessions. This also positively resulted in group cohesion.

Conducting counseling groups with two co-leaders has definite advantages. The cooperative relationship of the co-leaders models respect and trust to group members. Members benefit from the insight of and feedback from both co-leaders. The feedback may be different which allows for more discussion. If co-leaders are of the opposite sex, this can recreate dynamics of relationships with parents for some group members. Situations can be role played to work through such issues. Another benefit is that co-leaders share the responsibilities of the counseling sessions while providing support for one another [Corey, 1985; Jacombs, Harvill, and Masson (1988)]. Other advantages of co-leading are that it reduces leader burn-out and group need not be cancelled if one leader is absent. Also, when one leader is interacting with a group member, the other leader can observe the reactions of the rest of the group to the interaction. Later, the reactions can be discussed in the group (Corey and Corey, 1982).

Levine (1979) explained several techniques that can be used with co-leaders. Connecting is a technique where one leader observes a member who does not fully understand what the second leader is saying. The first leader then assists the member by rephrasing the statement. Another technique, support-confrontation, is useful with resistive members. When a member is resistive, one leader supports the member while the other leader confronts the members. The additional support seems to make these members less resistive.

The advantages of using co-leaders far outweigh the disadvantages, but there are some. Limited staff, limited time, and poor relationships between co-leaders seem to be the major disadvantages (Corey, 1985; Jacombs, Harvill, and Masson, 1988; Luchins, 1964). Limited staff may result in running groups with one leader. Limited time often means unplanned and unevaluated group sessions resulting in less productive groups. Poor relationships because of poor choice of co-leaders result in poor modeling in group. Lack of respect and competitiveness exhibited in poor co-leader's relationships can come out in group which will then hamper group development. When leaders do not have the same goals for the members, confusion can develop. At this point, some members may play the leaders against each other.

Personal Experiences As Teacher As A Co-Leader

I have spent fifteen years as a classroom teacher for the hearing impaired students ranging in age from five to fifteen years old. I became a special education teacher because of my sensitivity towards individuals and my ability to help others in need. These abilities have developed further because of my teaching experiences. It is also these qualities that encouraged me to pursue a master's degree in counseling.

The counselor training program I participated in covered a wide range of courses. Courses developing my intellectual abilities covered such areas as career planning, counseling multi-cultural clients, counseling children, and ethical issues in counseling. Courses that developed my awareness of the affective domain of counseling included participation in group sessions.

Now, as a counselor, I resist "saving" a client from talking about feelings of hurt, pain, and loneliness. I understand the therapeutic nature of expressing emotions.

For the past two years, I have co-led a counseling group with a school psychologist. The group was composed of the hearing impaired adolescents who were also my students. The purpose of the group was to provide the students with a place where they could express and discuss the difficulties of adolescence. The group process has been very effective. As the students became comfortable in expressing their feelings, they were able to discuss personal issues centering around self-image, peer-acceptance, family relationships, and their own hearing losses.

Improvement in several areas have been noticed. Parents report that their adolescents are discussing with their parents feelings about school, hearing loss, and relationships. In school, several of the students' attitudes towards their studies have changed greatly. Assignments are completed, grades have improved, and scores on the Iowa Test of Basic Skills (ITBS) have shown marked improvement. Several other group members have worked through their shyness and have joined the girls' basketball team. Overall, the students express a feeling of acceptance by their peers and their families, and they have become more accepting of themselves and others.

The positive events resulting from their counseling group are due to a variety of factors. The students' willingness to risk opening up and exploring various issues is definitely a major reason the group was effective. The relationships between the leaders and the group members created a trusty, supportive atmosphere which made it possible for group members to disclose. In addition, the dual role of the classroom teacher as leader, the training experiences of both co-leaders and the compatibility of the co-leaders also allowed for the success of the group.

There are advantages and disadvantages of serving in the dual role of teacher/ counselor. Because of the progress displayed by group members in and out of group, I feel the advantages far outweigh the disadvantages.

The Advantages

One of the advantages is that I was able to continue support for the group members outside of group. In group, members recognized new behaviors that they wished to incorporate into their daily lives. During class time, I would help members practice the new behaviors and assist them with the feelings that often followed. For example, one member exhibited a low self-esteem and often complained of other members picking on him. It was common during classtime that this member would be tormented by other classmates. At this time, I would encourage him to express his feelings and review the new behavior he could use during such situations. With the encouragement and added support outside of group, he was able to resist falling into the traps set by his tormentors.

Another advantage of the dual role of teacher/counselor is that I was aware of events that led up to emotions exhibited in group. When one group session centered on parents' lack of understanding, one member remained very quiet. I was aware that this member had just received a poor report card and had been reprimanded by her father. I encouraged her to discuss this and explore her feelings. She later discussed this matter with her father and was surprised at his ability to understand her feelings.

My awareness of my students' personal issues have helped me to better understand their home situations. When discussing class performance with parents, the conversations have frequently included hints of conflict at home. Now, as a teacher/counselor, I am more aware and sensitive to such situations. I am able to be empathetic and listen instead of giving advice. The parents seem to feel supported and to hear what I have to say as a teacher. I feel my relationship with most of my students and their parents has developed into one of support and cooperation.

At least once a month, we would video-tape a counseling session. I would take class time to view the tapes with the students. These viewing sessions turned out to be very productive. As members viewed the tapes, they re-examined feelings and issues. New behaviors such as confrontation techniques were discussed. Members were also able to gain information they had missed during group sessions. Occasionally, the viewing of the video tapes led to written essays, which added to the learning process.

Another advantage of the dual role is the use of both counseling and teaching skills. During group sessions, I was able to draw on my teaching skills when helping a member to understand an issue. Likewise, I used my counseling skills in the classroom. I have become more of a listener to student's ideas and concerns. I have allowed students to take responsibility for their learning and to suffer the consequences when poor choices are made.

The Disadvantages

One of the disadvantages of the dual role of teacher/counselor is time. Our group sessions took place once a week. The members missed an academic class period each week Another alternative would have been to hold the counseling group after school. It was also difficult to find time to plan and evaluate group sessions. Serving in the dual role adds additional time and energy to a job that is already more than full time.

The major disadvantage of the dual roles is the confusion that results from the role switching. Often I would find myself counseling during class or teaching during group. Once

I became aware of this, I discussed it during a group session. By making it evident that the roles were different, the student/members were able to expect certain behaviors from me in both settings. In groups, several members became agitated with me when I refused to tell a member how to solve her problem. The members later became aware that as leader I was a support person, not a teacher requiring certain responses. It also became necessary for me to inform my students that even though I was sensitive to their issues, I still expected a certain type of performance from them as students. Dual role can be confusing to the teacher/counselor and to the students/members. By recognizing and discussing the confusion and role expectations, much of the difficulties are settled.

A trap that is easy to fall into is expecting oneself to be able to help students and group members with all their problems. This is not only a disadvantage of being a teacher/counselor but can also be a disaster. It is very important to be aware of one's limits and to utilize the abilities of others. Recognizing the need to make referrals to other professionals allows the teacher/counselor to maintain an effective energy level and avoid "burn out" in either position.

Co-Leading A Counseling Group

Co-leading a group can be beneficial to the members as well as the co-leaders, but the benefits and the effectiveness of the group process will not exist if the co-leaders are unable to develop a compatible, cooperative relationship.

When the school psychologist approached me with the idea of co-leading a counseling group with my hearing impaired adolescents, we discussed the benefits, the disadvantages, and the roles of co-leaders. Having known each other professionally and socially for eight years, we were aware of our similar philosophies on education and counseling. We discussed them as well as our group counseling skills. Since I had very little experience as a group leader, I felt inadequate but was encouraged by her optimism of my skills.

Planning and implementing the group took time and cooperation. It also took the ability to be able to confront each other. We found it necessary for group's progress to be able to discuss our disagreements. Several times during sessions, one leader would stop group and discuss alternative methods to be used. By working through disagreements, we modeled effective relationship skills to group members. We also showed respect and support for one another, vital characteristics for co-leaders to possess.

Stages of Co-Leadership

Corey (1985) and Levine (1979) describe the roles of co-leaders as a relationship that evolves as the counseling group progresses through its stages. This relationship is dependent on the commitment and cooperation of both co-leaders. During the stages of group, it is important for co-leaders to share their feelings and their reactions with one another.

During the pre-group stage, my co-leader and I shared the excitement we both had with the prospect of co-leading together. I shared my uncertainty of being able to be as effective as her since she had more experience. We agreed that her ability would put her in a more active role initially. At this time, we also discussed the ground rules for the group.

During the initial stages of group, we utilized our planning and evaluation sessions to discuss our roles during the sessions. I gained more confidence in my abilities. I found myself observing my co-leader's interactions with the members, learning much from her. She encouraged me to participate more as co-leader and to trust my perceptions.

During the transitional stage, we focused on our personal reactions to what was happening in group. Expressing feelings of frustration with the lack of progress and doubts of our abilities gave us each support. Transference occurred several times during this stage. It was very helpful to share our feelings with each other as co-leaders and to discuss the transference. I realized what was really happening in group and was prepared for future occurrences.

Our group progressed into the working stage late into the school year. During our planning and evaluation sessions, we discussed techniques. We planned role play activities to aid members in conflict resolution. Because we as co-leaders were able to work through conflict ourselves and share our feelings about it, the group sessions progressed.

During the final stage, it was important for us to discuss our personal reactions to termination. The group experience had brought us closer together as friends and as professionals. We discussed the feelings we would experience after termination. This prepared us both for the experience.

After group ended, we discussed our group experience together. We evaluated the progress of each member as well as ourselves. We discussed what we felt was successful and what we would change. This whole process helped me to integrate my experience into a learning experience.

Conclusion

In conclusion, I would like to restate that the advantages of serving in the dual role of teacher/counselor outweigh the disadvantages. It must be kept in mind though that the teacher must receive training before assuming the role of counselor. In addition to training, the teacher must be willing to work through his/her own normal developmental issues.

Co-leadership can be a very effective and efficient way to lead counseling group. Both co-leaders must be cooperative and dedicated to the success of the group. Planning and evaluation sessions are as valuable as group sessions themselves. The compatibility and willingness of the co-leaders make for the success of the group.

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M.D. Classroom Groups

By: Jim Ott, School Psychologist

Abstract

There are many groups currently being conducted with M.D. students. These seem to center primarily on social skills training or some other "teaching" of specific skills. Often the teacher and group leader will meet, come up with a list of skills to be covered and the methods to be used. Then, the group is conducted in a structured manner frequently involving directed discussion, role playing, and other leader-directed activities. While there is a need for this type of group instruction, especially for M.D. students who often experience significant social difficulties, the potential exists for more open ended, less structured group experiences similar to those conducted with regular education students.

Admittedly, there are some considerations in dealing with students in Special Education programs which make M.D. groups unique. However, the six stages of group process on which much of the rest of this book is based, can be applied successfully to M.D. groups in a way which can result in rewarding growth experiences for both students and leaders.

The major portion of this chapter will be devoted to examining the six stages and considering the specific modifications that might be necessary in dealing with M.D. populations.

Pre-Group Stage

Unless you are in a large system with several classrooms of similarly aged M.D. students, most M.D. groups are going to involve most, if not all, students in a single classroom. This eliminates some of the decision making regarding who should be included.

Still, the leader should work closely with the teacher (whether or not the teacher will be co-leading the group) on deciding whether all students in the classroom should be included in the group. Factors which may influence this decision include:

- Functioning Level of Students - especially in a small system where an M.D. classroom may contain a wide diversity of students. One or more students may clearly be functioning at a higher or lower level than the bulk of the class. Including these students may not benefit them and may interfere with the smooth functioning of the group.

- Length/Goals of Group - Often teachers will request that a group session be conducted once a week throughout the year so that classroom issues can be discussed as they arise. In this case, it may be beneficial to include all students since various issues will likely include all students at one time or another. On the other hand, more limited time or issue groups may be more appropriately limited to students most likely to benefit.

- Number of students in class - Obviously it will be somewhat difficult for a single leader to run an effective group if there are fourteen or fifteen students. A co-leader increases both the number and diversity of students which can be accommodated in an M.D. group.

Deciding on whether to have a co-leader must be done at the pre-group stage. The advantages of having the teacher or aide as a co-leader are that the teacher or aide will be familiar with the student's strengths and difficulties and the relationships which exist between group members. The disadvantages are in some ways the same. Unintentionally, the teacher or aide may reinforce specific expectations of student roles restricting the opportunity for students to experience growth in new directions. Another possible factor is that the students may feel less inclined to talk openly about classroom issues in the presence of the teacher or aide.

Pre-group interviews with individual class-members may still be a good idea. They will give the leader a chance to discuss the purpose and structure of the group while seeking impressions from individual group members of what they would like to accomplish in group.

Depending on the group's goals, it may be appropriate to consider including regular education students in the group. These may be students who are dealing with similar issues as the M.D. students or they may be used as role models. An advantage of this is that it increases contact between regular and special education students, always a priority in increasing the acceptability of special education students in the regular education environment.

Other aspects of the pre-group stage such as goal setting, arranging times to meet, formulating possible rules, and informing parents will likely be conducted in much the same ways as other groups.

Initial Stage

If your group is comprised of students from a single classroom, much of the getting acquainted part of this stage will not be necessary. However, the basics of group functioning may require considerable work early on. Two factors seem to contribute to difficulties at this point:

1. The students, being from a classroom, are familiar with each other and have already established roles and behaviors (who leads, who stays quiet, who is laughed at, etc.). The leader may have to work at overcoming these roles in the group situation especially for those who are less likely to participate as a result of their roles in the classsroom.

2. Part of an M.D. student's adaptive behavior deficit often includes some social skills deficiencies. This will obviously differ for the various students, but difficulties with give-and-take conversation, sticking to a single subject, self-disclosure, identifying

82

feelings, responding appropriately to another's opinion, and so on, should be expected. At the initial stage, the group may in some ways resemble a social skills group in that specific instruction and practice on these basic group skills will likely be required. However, the danger here is that the group will become like other social skills groups the students have no doubt experienced. The leader teaches, and the students respond only when the leader requests. It is difficult to overcome this expectation of group functioning on the students' part, especially if the students require a great deal of help to learn the skills needed in the more open-ended, conversational group you are trying to establish. Simple activities which can help the students learn the kind of conversational flow expected include tossing out a single, non-threatening topic and letting the students discuss it (topics might range from the zoo to food to pets and so on). Another possibility includes reading a short story and having the students discuss their reactions to it. For elementary-aged students, materials like the Mr. and Little Miss books work well for this. Having the students ask each other questions and then responding to each other's answers can also work well. For example, the leader might ask one student, "What's your favorite animal and why?" That student responds, and the others are free to react to the student's answer. That student then asks another student the same question, or depending on your group make-up, a question of the student's own choosing. This can help the student begin to experience each other rather than just the leader initiating questioning. There are clearly many other similarly structured, non-threatening conversational practice activities which each leader can create.

Establishng rules and such reinforcement systems as you may desire will likely work in a similar way to other counseling groups. The greatest threat to an effective M.D. group at this stage is excessive structure and direction imposed by the leader. More structure and leadership instruction will be required in the initial stage of a group with M.D. students than regular students. However, if the instruction becomes too much the focus of the group, it may never progress past that point to a group which can deal with more complex issues. As with any group, there will be difficult moments in the early going, moments in which students won't know what to say or won't say anything. These moments may be even more prolonged and uncomfortable with M.D. students. Teaching the students how to work through those moments without doing it oneself is the major task of the group leader at this stage.

Transition Stage

One of the most difficult aspects of this stage is getting the students to say what they are feeling rather than saying what they believe the leader wants to hear. The mistake leaders make is to conduct the group in such a way that the focus is on questions and answers rather than on open-ended discussion. Students who already tend to think in concrete terms will have increased difficulties dealing with more abstract concepts in a situation which seems to require specific right and wrong answers.

Another aspect of transition stage with M.D. students is a tendency to tell stories about a specific subject but to have difficulty analyzing the story in light of the issue being discussed. This is to be somewhat expected in light of the functioning level of the students. It is important to be sensitive to this occuring and to help the students understand to the maximum of their abilities how a story relates to a certain issue and to finish with one student's story before beginning another. Otherwise, it is very easy, for example, for a discussion on being afraid to turn into a discussion of birds as a story about being afraid of a dog leads to one about a pet dog which leads to several stories about pets in general which lead to someone with a pet bird!

It is also important to help the group members learn to pick out the important details in a story. M.D. students will tend to pick out the most salient, concrete part of a story on which to base their responses. Again, a student may tell a story about being afraid of a dog, and the item which will stick out to other group members will be the dog rather than the fear. Frequent reminders of the issue being discussed as well as helpful specific questions will help in this area. However, expect to work on this issue often in your M.D. group.

Establishing trust is important at this stage as with other groups. One issue is particularly important in dealing with an M.D. classroom group. If the teacher is not going to function as a co-leader, then it should be established early on whether or not the teacher will be kept informed of group discussions. This will depend on teacher personality and subjects to be discussed. Regardless of what you decide, make sure you and the teacher agree on the issue and are consistant.

Another possible problem to watch for, especially with the large amount of contact classmates often have, is that of group members forming small groups outside of the group sessions and discussing group issues outside of group. This is especially a problem if a small group decides not to be cooperative or to target a particular student for poor treatment in the group. The leader will have to be sensitive to the possibility of this occuring.

Working Stage

Even in this stage of the group process, specific instruction on appropriate reactions and conversational skills will continue to be an important part of your M.D. group, more so than might be experienced in other groups. Quite frankly, some of the students may never quite grasp the process and will continue to tell stories instead of dealing with actual issues. However, many group members will effectively participate, and the group can move on to a very productive phase in which important issues can be explored and significant self-disclosure and personal growth can occur.

There are two particular issues to watch for in the working stage in M.D. groups. One is that students may begin to use the group as a pseudo-courtroom in which the leader and members sit as judge and jury. An incident between two or more class members will occur, and they will bring it to group and present their "cases", expecting the leader to deliver judgement as to who was right and who was wrong. The incident involved can provide excellent material for the group discussion. However, the leader must be careful to avoid the often tempting opportunity to assume the role of the "judge". Initially, the M.D. students will have difficulty analyzing the situation for themselves and will require some direction, but it is important that they learn to do this for themselves in the relative safety of the group situation if they are likely to learn to do so in their interactions with others outside of the group, their classroom, and their school.

A second issue is that of transfer of skills to situations outside of the group. This is an area in which using the teacher as co-leader can be helpful. Issues are discussed, and personal goals and assignments are made. Then through the week, the teacher can monitor progress and reinforce positive steps made. If this type of monitoring is available, the assignments and goals can be worked into any reinforcement system you may be using. Setting not only individual but also classroom goals can help foster a cooperative working environment for the students.

Ttransfer of ideas and concepts with M.D. students can be difficult. It is beneficial to move more slowly than you might with other groups, sticking to a single subject or issue and spending many sessions on it. While this might be frustrating for the group leader, it will result in more complete and lasting behavior change in the long run. The fact that extended time is often needed to effect change is one argument for having long-term groups with M.D. classrooms, especially if there are several needs to be addressed in the group.

Final Stage

One of the aspects lacking from an M.D. classroom group in the final stage is the separation of the group members since the students will continue to meet together in their classroom. However, other aspects are similar especially if your group has become an effective avenue for the students to deal with the issues and to express feelings. One positive activity at this stage is to explore ways they can continue to deal with issues outside of group; who they can talk to, where to go for help, etc. Stress the idea that the growth process begun in group can continue outside of group.

One way to ease this transition is to brief significant others such as teachers (including art, music, physical education, recess), parents, and other adults on ways they can help the student apply new skills and concepts learned in group. This can then be supplemented with effective follow-up with students and adults in the post-group stage.

It is also beneficial in this stage to review what has been covered in group and to discuss student reactions to the group in general. Review of the concepts can involve discussion as well as brief repetitions of role plays or other activities used for each concept. This will help you as leader get an impression of how much the students have retained. Getting students' impressions of the group will help you critique your own performance.

Post-Group Stage

The follow-up activities involved with other groups at this stage apply to groups with M.D. students as well. If your group has lasted through the school year, it may be a good idea to follow-up with the group members at the beginning of the next school year. This will allow you both to check on retention of concepts from the previous year and to assess the need for a new group in the present year.

Summary Comments

Working with M.D. students in a group situation can go beyond basic social skills training and is very rewarding. Often these students have had little opportunity or experience with exploring their feelings and seeing how their feelings relate to those of other children. As stated several times there are special considerations in working with M.D. classroom groups. For example, it is important that the leader, regardless of title (psychologist, social worker, etc.) be familiar with developmental psychology in the areas of both intellectual functioning and social development as well as psychopathology. This is needed to adequately assess the needs and potential of individual group members and of the group as a whole. However, every group is different, and this assessment process is not so different from assessing the needs of any group that varies on age or purpose or any other factor. Specific modifications for working with M.D. students will probably include increased structure and training in group process. Another important issue will be the slower pace needed to insure maximum transfer of new skills to the real world outside the group. As with any group, you as the leader will have to experiment and discover those techniques which work best for you. With time and patience, M.D. discussion groups will become as effective and satifying as groups with more traditional populations.

Group Counseling With The Hearing Impaired

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Abstract

The primary impact of hearing loss on the child and his/her family is on the communication process which subsequently affects speech and langauge development, background experiences, relationships, and acquisition of social skills. A developmental approach to group counseling is presented which addresses these issues. The author describes practical considerations in developing a group for the hearing impaired including: counseling strategies, specific materials, and necessary accommodations.

Introduction

Hearing impaired children comprise approximately 3% of the school-age population. Because of the low incidence of this handicapping condition, many school psychologists and social workers infrequently encounter a deaf or hard-of-hearing child. This chapter is designed for practitioners who may have only an occasional opportunity to serve this population, as well as for those assigned to larger programs for the hearing impaired.

The author will provide an overview of the basics of hearing impairment and highlight important factors. A review of the literature regarding counseling services for the hearing impaired will be presented. Finally, the author will describe practical considerations including: developmental factors related to the social/emotional needs of different age groups, counseling techniques which may be emphasized, and typical issues which prevail among the hearing impaired. Specific group counseling strategies, materials, and necessary accommodations will be discussed. The author has worked with the hearing impaired population for the past ten years providing assessment, counseling, consultation, and family intervention for a program serving children ranging in age from birth to nineteen.

Background Information

The understanding of hearing impairment involves much technical information. It is important to review several methods by which hearing loss is classified.

Hearing impairments are classified according to several criteria. First is degree: Mild (20-40 dB), Moderate (40-60 dB), Severe (60-80 dB), and Profound (80>dB). Secondly is age of onset: prelingual or post-lingual, referring to the age at which language is acquired. Thirdly is type of loss: Conductive, which refers to the obstruction of sound waves through the external canal or middle ear; Sensori-neural, which reflects damage to the inner ear; or Central, referring to damage of the central nervous system (Happ and Altmaier, 1982).

All of these factors must be considered when reviewing a child's hearing loss and the extent to which it interferes with communication and day-to-day functioning.

One confusing concept is the description of children as "hard of hearing" or "deaf". A child referred to as "hard of hearing" may have a loss ranging from mild-to-severe but generally is able to receive speech with or without the use of a hearing aid. Their speech and language skills may be deviant but have been developed primarily through the auditory channel. A child referred to as "deaf" usually has a severe-to-profound loss. The auditory channel has been sufficiently damaged to preclude the normal development of speech and language with or without amplification (Ross, 1977). The confusion between these categories arises because children often do not fit neatly into one category. Vernon and Ottinger (1980) state that those working with hearing impaired children need to recognize that individual abilities in communication skills will vary widely, even among children who have losses within the same category.

Vernon (1969) stated that "the major handicap of deafness is the resulting impairment of communication". This impact on communication affects all areas of the child's life. The most obvious of these are speech and language deficits. The hearing impaired often demonstrate delays in vocabulary, sentence structure, comprehension, and use of abstract verbal concepts. When reviewing literature regarding communication systems for the hearing impaired, significant differences emerge between ideologies regarding oralism and various forms of manual communication. The inexperienced or neutral practitioner should be aware of research cited from Lowell (1957 - 58) indicating that "the best lip readers understand only 26% of what is said in one-to-one situations". A variety of manual communication systems are utilized across the country and practitioners are encouraged to familiarize themselves with the model used by their school system.

It has been stated by Williams and Sussman (1971), that most learning is acquired through the auditory channel. When hearing is impaired the child's experiential base can be severely limited. This lack of information has a significant impact on the acquisition of academic skills and subsequently is reflected in vocational options. The average deaf adult has approximately fourth grade abilities (Patterson and Stewart, 1971). Rainer, et-al. (1963) report that 80% of hearing impaired adults are in manual labor as contrasted to 50% of the general population. To the lay person these deficiencies and lowered skills may appear to represent limited intellectual capacity. However, research by Vernon (1968) and Furth (1973) indicate that the hearing impaired have the same distribution of intelligence as their hearing counterparts.

Another significant impact of hearing loss is felt by the family. The majority (90%) of hearing impaired children are born to hearing parents (Harvey, 1982). If parents fail to resolve their feelings through the grief process and accept their child's hearing loss, they may fail to learn to communicate effectively with their child. This may result in a sense of isolation from family members and inadequate relationships with significant others. Poor communication may also limit knowledge of social customs and values and may lead to overprotection and dependency (Mindel and Vernon, 1971). These children will not only have difficulty functioning in the family but in the community at large. Behavioral difficulties often noted among the hearing impaired include poor impulse control, externalization of blame, inadequate social skills, and lowered self esteem. All of the factors discussed above certainly contribute to these difficulties.

The hearing impaired population generally lags behind their hearing peers in the diversity of their experiences and in their knowledge regarding social and personal issues (Skyer, 1982). These children are very appropriate candidates for counseling services. In fact, Thorn and Israelson (1983) state that "schools have an obligation to assist hearing impaired children developmentally in the area of social and emotional growth as well as in learning skills..." Little has been written regarding counseling services for the hearing impaired. An article by Patterson and Stewart (1971) describes the basic counseling process as similar to that provided to a hearing client. The primary factor to consider is the client's communication needs. Counseling sessions should be conducted in the mode of communication most comfortable for the client. If this mode includes sign language, the use of an interpreter may be necessary. Professional interpreters are available through the Register of Interpreters for the Deaf (RID). Most school systems with hearing impaired programs provide interpreters to their students.

The counselor may consider using an interpreter in several situations. First, if the counselor is not fluent in the use of sign language, an interpreter will be necessary for communication. Another situation may occur when a counselor is fluent in sign but may be working with a mixed group in which one or more members use sign while other members may not. In this case an interpreter may be necessary as it is very difficult to provide effective therapy and simultaneously be concerned about accurate interpretation (Harvey, 1985). The use of an interpreter involves both advantages and disadvantages to the counseling process. While communication will be facilitated, rapport between client and counselor will be affected by the introduction of a third party. This also raises issues of privacy and confidentiality (Brauer, 1978). The RID Code of Ethics (1976) clearly outline the role of the interpreter and strictly prohibit them from disclosing information or contributing their own feelings or opinions. If a counselor chooses to use an interpreter, it is important to develop a working relationship, because, as Harvey (1985) states, a "mutually supportive and respectful relationship between therapist and interpreter is critical to successful treatment". Although interpreters provide accurate transliteration of the client's communication, there is always a minimal level of content distortion. It is not feasible to interpret everything due to subtle nuances in body language, facial cues, and so forth. Therefore, the counselor may need to discuss a session with the interpreter to more fully understand the client's communication. Another subtle problem which may occur when using an interpreter is the imposition of a time delay in interpreting what is said. The therapist will need to be a good director of verbal traffic, watching the deaf person to see when they wish to enter the conversational flow. (Schein, 1981).

In reviewing other aspects of counseling the hearing impaired, Patterson and Stewart (1971) state that often less verbal and abstract approaches have been used with this population. Due to their experiential deficits, it may also be necessary to function as an instructor to impart information. However, once underway, the group will cover content similar to that of normal hearing groups. The therapist must be sensitive to themes involving communication problems (Schein, 1981). In a more practical vein, it is also important to visually evaluate the environment. Because communication with the hearing impaired relies heavily on visual concentration, the room needs to be well illuminated and free of distractions. In a group counseling format, a semi-circular seating arrangement will afford maximum visual contact among members (Robinson, 1978). Room acoustics must also be evaluated as they will affect the person wearing hearing aids. Bare walls, high ceilings, and uncarpeted floors will increase reverberations and reduce speech intelligibility.

Applications in Group Counseling

With primary-age children (five - eight) the goals of group counseling are to build the foundations of basic group skills, e.g. attending, turn taking, and participating. Much time is spent focusing on these behaviors through management systems reinforcing such rules as: raising hands, staying in seat, listening, participating, and cooperating. For children to function within a group, it is also necessary for them to have the language to control the situation and express themselves. Therefore, early counseling experiences focus on development of affective vocabulary and verbal expression of feelings and thoughts. Many hearing impaired children have socialization difficulties due to communication delays and subsequent frustrations. Therefore, basic social interactions are taught and practiced to aid problem solving.

One curriculum which has been used extensively with the hearing impaired is Developing Understanding of Self and Others (DUSO) (Dinkmeyer, 1970). This curriculum has been adapted for use with the hearing impaired with permission of the publisher both through Kendall Demonstration Elementary School in Washington, D.C. and through the Grant Wood Area Education Agency, Cedar Rapids, Iowa. The author has found that this curriculum meets the basic goals discussed above in counseling this age level. The language level and basic group skills of the specific children must be evaluated, and activities must utilize highly visual and activity-oriented tasks. Another curriculum which has been useful with this age level is Self Esteem for Little Folk (Stone, et al, 1983). This program has adapted ideas from a variety of sources for use with the hearing impaired. The author has found bi-weekly sessions of twenty-thirty minutes to be most effective. Practitioners may find the use of photographs, videotaping, and role playing particularly helpful in aiding comprehension and stimulating interest and participation.

Issues which appear most important at this age level include acceptance by peers and awareness of their differences. In kindergarten and first grade the children seem very preoccupied with their similarities to other hearing impaired classmates. They often will imitate each other's behaviors or choices in activities. This strong need to identify with others like themselves is also apparent as they become more aware of their hearing loss. Even in mainstreamed settings, little interaction between hearing and hearing impaired children is noted in less-structured situations such as recess or lunch. Reverse integration is often utilized to encourage interaction and understanding between hearing impaired children and their hearing classmates. As the children enter second or third grade, they often begin questioning the cause of their loss, audiometric equipment, and alternative communication systems. The author has utilized art therapy, bibliotherapy, and dramatics to more fully explore these issues. Factual information regarding the basics of hearing and the ear is also provided.

Intermediate age children (nine - twelve) generally have developed the basic group skills necessary for productive group discussions and activities. The goals of this age level are to improve more complex group behaviors such as showing emphathy and to build more sophisticated communication and social skills. The author has used several curriculums with this age level including Toward Affective Development (Dupont, et al., 1974) and Skillstreaming the Elementary Age Child (McGinnis, et al., 1984). Children at this age level seem most interested in peer relationships but often have difficulties with the social skills necessary to interact with peers. These materials assist in developing basic communication skills such as: making introductions, asking a question, or contributing to discussions. It is also helpful to focus on problem solving and conflict resolution as difficulties among peers are inevitable. Specific activities may include: viewing a situation from another person's perspective, identifying and expressing your feelings, and negotiating a solution to a problem.

One social problem emerges as a result of the hearing impaired child's communication delays. They often have not learned the basic rules of games or activities. These rules are communicated verbally by hearing children and often have informal variations. Time is spent teaching the rules of specific games the children will encounter on the playground or in the neighborhood, and role plays occur on how to negotiate a disagreement and show sportsmanship.

With the intermediate age level, group counseling sessions can be lengthened from thirty to forty minutes and generally occur once weekly. The author has utilized field trips, films, videotaping, and homework assignments as an adjunct to the activities discussed above.

As the children reach adolescence, the author has moved from structured, activity-based groups to a "talk group" format. This age group is generally preoccupied with themes of independence versus dependence. Group topics often include a discussion of the student's need to be more in direct control of their lives, autonomous from school staff or parents. This theme may be exaggerated in a special education population where there is some inherent dependency on interpreters or teachers in a small class setting.

Another normal adolescent issue is related to peer acceptance. At this age level, the normal feelings of inadequacy or insecurity are further complicated by any deficit, real or perceived. The hearing impaired adolescent, therefore, often focuses on issues surrounding his/her hearing loss such as: use of hearing aids, speech problems, impaired academic achievement, and reduced communication skills. Adolescents often describe a sense of isolation both from peers and family members who they perceive as not accepting their differences. Feelings of sadness and depression are explored.

As the students share these common themes, the sense of universality often provides an internal support group. This interpersonal learning is important due to the exaggerated sense of isolation felt by hearing impaired youth. They may fail to recognize that others share their feelings and experiences. As the group becomes more cohesive it moves through the normal stages of group development. Conflicts between members emerge and basic social and communication skills can be reinforced. The students learn to improve their listening skills and empathy for others, while learning to resolve conflicts more appropriately.

Issues of self awareness and esteem are also very important to this age level. Once again, the hearing loss becomes a critical issue. One interesting pattern which emerges in pre-adolescence or early adolescence pertains to the hard-of-hearing youngster. Mykelbust (1969) and Davis (1981) both contend that partial hearing loss affects the self concept more drastically because being so close to "normal" makes it more difficult to accept the disability. The author has observed many hard-of-hearing children who appear to feel caught between two worlds, hearing and deaf. Some attempt to join the deaf world and avoid hearing peers. They may use sign language extensively and even regress in their speech skills. Others attempt to join the hearing world and may deny any ramifications of their hearing loss by refusing to attend resource classes or wear amplification. Either extreme can be dealt with through the group counseling process. Anxiety can be alleviated by sharing their feelings with peers who also have experienced their confusion.

Another role the group leader may need to play with the hearing impaired adolescent is that of educator. During group discussion, it may become apparent that background knowledge is deficient regarding certain issues. Basic information may need to be imparted regarding sexuality, dating, alcohol, or substance abuse, legal issues, and so forth. The author has used films and speakers to provide information and stimulate further discussion of a variety of topics.

In counseling the adolescent a number of practical issues must be confronted. Scheduling weekly sessions can be difficult. The practitioner may also have to consider the low incidence of this handicap and include hearing impaired students with other groups. Individual characteristics must be carefully assessed. The author has included hearing impaired children in groups of normal hearing, regular education populations, as well as in groups with other handicapping conditions. This integration will require evaluation of specific factors such as: cognitive abilities, social skills, language development, etc. Many similarities exist between the hearing impaired and other handicapping conditions. Issues regarding self esteem, frustration, loss, and peer acceptance will span a variety of groups. It is also important to recognize that the hearing impaired child is more like his hearing peers than he is different. Normal issues of childhood and adolescence emerge. Including hearing impaired students in hearing groups can facilitate mainstreaming and provide a means to address their needs. Palmer (1980) also found that having deaf and hearing students in the same group promoted mutual respect.

Summary

The author has addressed the impact of hearing loss on the child and his/her family. The primary impact is on communication which may result in speech and language delays, limitations in background experiences, altered relationships between family members and inadequate social skills. Hearing impaired children are excellent candidates for group counseling. A developmental approach was presented which included: building basic group skills and communication abilities, developing social skills, and problem-solving strategies, and encouraging self awareness and acceptance of their hearing loss. Issues regarding the necessary accommodations were discussed including the use of an interpreter and specific curricular approaches. The author strongly encourages professionals working with the hearing impaired to include them in counseling groups. While these students do require some accommodation and expertise, they are more *like* their hearing peers than they are different, and they benefit greatly from the service.

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